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Airships—the mystery solved

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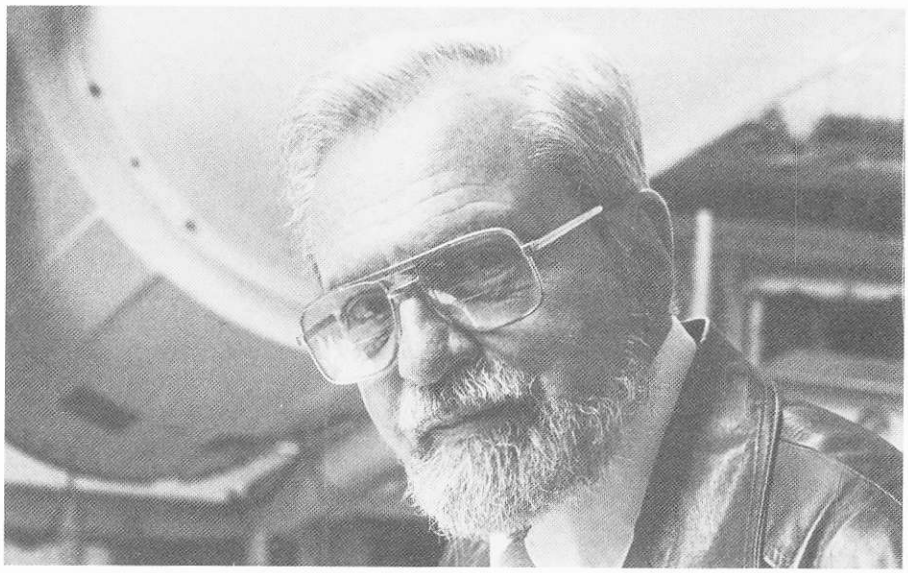

J. Allen Hynek
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EDITORIAL

You can't always get what you want

Mark Rodeghier

For many years, ever since, I suppose, civilian UFO organizations were formed, we have been waiting for the perfect case, the case that will make the existence of an unknown, scientifically important UFO phenomenon irrefutable, the case that is so dramatic and clearcut that all our work and effort will be recognized and rewarded by the powers that be.

It has been a pleasant fantasy all these years, too. It was one that could occupy desultory conversations among colleagues or, though we might not admit it, be the only event that we believed would get the attention ufology and UFOs deserve. In our wildest dreams, we even hoped that the case would involve the military, with an open admission (imagine that!) that something unexplained had been observed.

Well, guess what? Sometimes dreams do come true, but they aren't always what we had expected they would be. That has now been demonstrated conclusively in ufology, because last year, in Belgium, the dream of the perfect case came true, but its aftermath was hardly what we had imagined.

As has been reported in *IUR* and the *MUFON UFO Journal*, plus several overseas publications, the Belgian wave of late 1989 and 1990 was astonishing in several respects. First, many of the sightings were mass events, witnessed by hundreds of people at widespread locations. This happened a number of times during the wave, which was most intense from late November 1989 to May 1990. Second, the same UFO was seen repeatedly, a triangular-shaped object that often flew low and slow over Belgium, making observation of it that much easier. Third, because of this behavior, at least 20 videotapes were taken during the wave, many with remarkable detail. And most significantly, the Belgian government, through the air force, took a very serious attitude toward the reports and entered into an agreement with SOBEPS, the leading Belgian UFO group, to investigate the sightings. As illustration, the gendarmarie were instructed to forward reports to SOBEPS for investigation.

As if all this were not enough, the air force made its aircraft available for interceptions, coordinating these activities with radar stations and SOBEPS investigators. The effort bore fruit on the night of March 30 of last year when a UFO was seen visually and on several radars, causing the air force to scramble two planes. In June the government had a press conference and *admitted* it couldn't explain the sightings that night. The air force denied that the sighting could have been caused by Stealth aircraft, ultralight fliers, mirages, radar malfunctions, or any other conventional source. And government interest has not dissipated since then, as reported in the latest issue of *Inforespace*, the publication of SOBEPS.

All of this sounds wonderful, doesn't it? I would suppose that scientists are dropping their research projects to study UFOs, that government money has been made available for UFO investigations, that media have stopped ridiculing UFO proponents and those who report UFOs, and that, all in all, ufology is well on its way to respectability, both in Belgium and around the world.

I don't have to tell you that none of these things has happened. Scientists have paid no more attention to UFOs then they did before. Scientific publications have ignored the wave, and those that have mentioned it have done so with the crudest debunking seen for years. Thus *Science & Vie*, a French publication, dismissed the whole Belgium wave on the basis of one explainable photo. Even more ludicrous, a leading American debunker privately gave me this "explanation" for the events of March 30: the Belgium government *fabricated* the radar evidence. I'm not kidding, and neither was he.

All is not doom and gloom, of course. The Belgian investigators have gained the respect of their government and some scientists within that country. They continue to carefully study both the events of March 30 and the wave itself, and they will not be rushed to any premature conclusions. Those of us interested in ufology can point to the Belgian wave as further evidence for the existence of a worldwide, unexplained UFO phenomenon.

In fact, the Belgian wave only confirms a hypothesis I have had for several years: there will be no more classic UFO waves, like 1947 or 1973 in America, 1978 in Italy, or 1954 in France. A classic wave lasts for only a month or two, has many different types of reports, occurs over a large geographical area, and *does not* involve mass sightings by hundreds of witnesses.

In the late 1970s the UFO phenomenon changed, worldwide. UFO waves as just described disappeared, physical trace cases became less common, abduction

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Airships: Part I

by Jerome Clark

■■ **Jerome Clark is editor of *IUR* and vice president of CUFOS. His books include *UFOs in the 1980s* (1990) and (with J. Gordon Melton and Aidan A. Kelly) *New Age Almanac* (1991). The following article is adapted from his forthcoming *The Emergence of a Phenomenon* (Apogee Books), a study of the early years of the UFO controversy.**

On March 29, 1880, the *Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican* reported an odd incident said to have occurred three days before in the tiny town of Galisteo Junction (now Lamy), New Mexico. According to the account, three men on a late-evening walk heard loud voices which they quickly learned emanated from a "large balloon" rapidly approaching from the west. As it got closer, the voices got louder, as if the speakers were shouting to attract attention. But their message was lost to the listeners, who heard a language they did not recognize. A party of sorts seemed to be going on, judging from the laughter and music emanating from the aircraft.

"The construction of the balloon was different to [sic] anything of the kind ever seen by any of the party, being in the shape of a fish," the *New Mexican* related, "and at one time was so low that fanciful characters on the outside of the car, which appeared to be very elegant, were plainly seen. The air machine appeared to be entirely under the control of the occupants, and appeared to be guided by a large fanlike apparatus. . . . The balloon was monstrous in size, and the car, as near as could be judged, contained eight or 10 persons."

As the object passed overhead, several items were tossed overboard. One, recovered almost immediately, proved to be a "magnificent flower, with a slip of exceedingly fine silk-like paper, on which were some characters resembling those on Japanese tea chests."

After a rapid ascent the craft disappeared in the eastern sky.

The next morning searchers found a cup of "very peculiar workmanship." It, along with the flower, was put on display at the local railroad depot (whose agent was one of the three witnesses). Later in the day an unnamed curiosity collector, a man who had been doing archaeological excavations at an old church in the area, purchased the items. The following evening, according to an April 5 article in the *New Mexican*, a party of tourists arrived in town to visit the church site. In the group was a wealthy young Chinese man who immediately recognized the writing on the silk slip as a message from his fiance. The young man declared that the airship was from China, on a vanguard voyage to America; soon such traffic would be commonplace. His girl friend, a passenger on the ship, was on her way to New York, where a sister lived. Knowing he would be visiting Galisteo Junction, she had left a small present for him. "The gentleman left on last night's train for New York carrying the love token with him," the newspaper said, "and confidently expects to find his love in New York where they will be married."

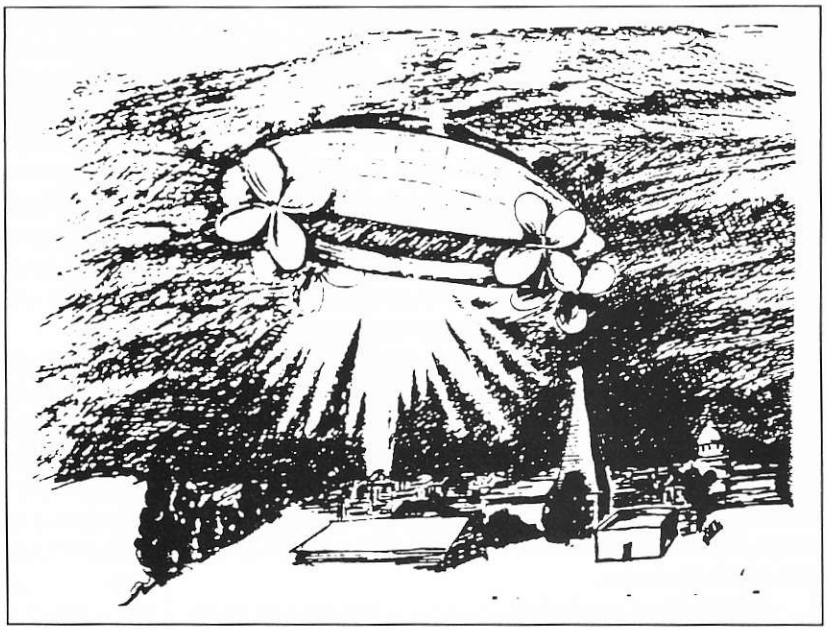
A few months later, on July 29, an equally unusual story appeared in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Early the previous evening, it was said, two Louisville men gazed out over the Ohio River to see, at some altitude, what looked to be a man surrounded by machinery which he was working with his hands and feet. At times the contraption would descend; then the man would move faster, and the object would rise. At one point he changed direction, from the southwest to the southeast. Soon the strange device flew out of sight. That evening, but an hour or two later, according to an August 6 *Courier-Journal* account, the Royster family of Madisonville, Kentucky (southwest of Louisville), observed a "circular form [which] changed to an oval. . . . [T]here seemed to be a ball at each end of the thing." It was half a mile away, low in the sky, and passed out of sight going straight south.

In September the New York press took note of local reports of a "flying machine operated by a man" (*New York World*, September 3) and of a "man with bat's wings and improved frog's legs . . . at least a thousand feet in the air . . . flying toward the New Jersey coast . . . [with] a cruel and determined expression" (*New York Times*, September 12).

In March 1892 accounts in the *New York Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and other newspapers detailed a furious controversy raging on the border of Russian Poland and Germany, scene of numerous sightings of mysterious "balloons." The objects, usually seen coming from the west, were thought to be carrying German spies. Observers said the vehicles appeared fully maneuverable —in other words, not subject to the vagaries of the wind, as with conventional balloons—and even able to hover for as long as 40 minutes at a time. They also carried brilliant searchlights.

These curious, and apparently isolated, stories would serve as a small preview of a much greater epic to come, one that would occupy newspapers all over the United States for six months between November 1896 and April 1897. They also exemplify the many problems a modern researcher faces in trying to make sense of early press accounts of UFO-like events. The alleged witnesses are long dead, and there is no way to determine their sincerity or the accuracy of their testimony. We do not even know in many cases if the tales are anything other than journalistic inventions.

If the European reports seem to have an air of credibility (if nothing to do with what is known of the aviation or weapons technology of the period), the New Mexican report is absurd on its face. Vehicles of the sort described in the newspaper account were not flying, or even could fly, in the America of the late 19th Century, or even of the early 20th (Cohen, 1981; Lore and Deneault, 1968). Air traffic between China and the United States was a technological impossibility. To all appearances the story is someone's idea of a joke; if so, however, it would be a joke often repeated in the years ahead.



Artist's conception of the airship that appeared in newspapers of the era (From the files of August C. Roberts).

The American publication of Jules Verne's popular *Robur the Conqueror*, a sort of airborne version of his earlier *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) in which a marvelous airship takes the place of Capt. Nemo's wondrous submarine, was seven years away when the Galisteo Junction story saw print, but by 1880 there was no shortage of popular speculation about heavier-than-air flight, which figured prominently in science-fictional adventure tales (Miller, 1987; Moskowitz, 1959). In 1862 aviation enthusiasts in France formed a society to promote research and experiments in this area, and the following year Verne became its recording secretary. In the United States inventors published designs for rigid dirigibles and powered aircraft, but what flights there were consisted of little more than short hops. In 1869, for example, Frederick Marriott of California managed to keep a winged, steam-powered dirigible aloft for one mile. In 1872 German engineer Paul Haenlein used a four-cylinder internal-combustion engine (which ran on coal gas from a supporting bag) to power a semi-rigid-frame dirigible. The following year the *New York Daily Graphic* sponsored an attempt to send a 400,000-cubic-foot balloon, with attached lifeboat, across the Atlantic Ocean, but the bag tore open as it was being inflated. On November 13, 1897, the first metal dirigible was flown successfully from Berlin, but leaking gas caused it to crash after several miles in flight. No history of aviation reports flights of large, powered dirigibles and other aircraft over the Western United States at any time in the 19th Century, the dreams and schemes of would-be inventors notwithstanding (Berliner, 1978).

In the summer of 1896 a man looking out the door of a mail car on a train moving through Iowa saw a strange sight. He reported the incident to the *Monthly Weather Review*:

"The darkness was intense; not a ray of light was visible from any point, except from the train. When a few miles out from Princeton, and while traveling almost due north, I observed a peculiar light low down on the western horizon. It appeared to be perfectly round and about a foot in diameter, of a dull rose color, or, possibly, like a piece of live coal. When first observed it seemed to be floating within a hundred feet of the earth, but soon rose to a height about midway between the horizon and the zenith. For a time it floated very steadily, but soon began to oscillate up and down, at times even dropping out of sight behind hills. The wind was quite strong from the east, but the light traveled in an almost due north course. Its speed varied, sometimes seeming to outrun the train considerably, and at others it would fall behind, but never far enough to be lost to sight. Most of the time it appeared to be nearly abreast of the train and apparently from half a mile to a mile distant. Soon after it was first observed by me, my companion arose, and we both watched it closely until the town of Lineville, Iowa, was reached. There it passed out of sight behind the depot, and we saw it no more" (Corliss, 1982).

If this sighting had occurred a few months later—and in fact many similar sightings would be made from moving trains—the observer would probably have reported that he had seen the light of an airship.

The California saga

The great American airship scare begins in California in the fall of 1896. On the evening of November 17, between six and seven o'clock, according to the next day's *Sacramento Evening Bee*, a light resembling an "electric arc lamp propelled by some mysterious force" passed over the city and was seen by hundreds of persons as it traveled at low altitude and, as if intelligently controlled, took evasive action as it approached buildings and hills. Some observers claimed to have gotten a good look at the object and to have heard voices. Accounts differed as to whether they were arguing about the course they were to take or "singing in a chorus, a rattling song, which gradually died away in the distance" (*San Francisco Call*, November 18). Residents of Oak Park, a Sacramento suburb, told reporters that the day before, an aerial object had circled the town at a high altitude and left a trail of smoke.

The incident sparked enormous excitement and much press comment. Rumors spread that an airship had been secretly developed in Oak Park or that one had flown in from the East Coast. There was also, however, great skepticism. The *San Francisco Chronicle* called the Sacramento airship "probably one of the greatest hoaxes . . . ever sprung on any community" but in practically the next breath acknowledged "it is hard to account for the evident sincerity of those who claim they saw the machine and heard the voices" (November 19). The next day, however, it approvingly quoted Prof. George Davidson's remark that the affair was the "outcome of a sort of free masonry of liars. Half a dozen fellows have got together, sent up a balloon with some sort of an electric light attachment, and imagination has done the rest. It is a pure fake." The *Oakland Tribune* likened the airship to the sea serpent, which "never appeared . . . when there was any dearth of whiskey. The air ship . . . cannot be verified properly without the liberal use of stimulant." To the *Woodland Mail* the airship was "about the thinnest fake yet set afloat."

The airship—or anyway "mysterious lights moving through the air at a great distance from the earth," in the *Call*'s words—made a return appearance over Sacramento on the 20th. The next afternoon, at just after five o'clock, passengers on a streetcar in Oakland saw a "peculiar-looking contrivance" high overhead. It had a headlight in front and a searchlight on the bottom. One witness said it "somewhat resembled a balloon traveling end on . . . and with what appeared to be wings both before and behind the [bottom] light" (*Call*, November 22). Earlier that afternoon a bizarre aerial phenomenon was observed near Tagus, just north of Tulare (southeast of Sacramento): an "immense sheet spread out in the air," heading northwest and seemingly against the wind. The *Call* reported that at least one sighting had occurred in early October, when a young woman riding a wheel along San Francisco's Telegraph Avenue observed a "strange-looking object" with a powerful headlight passing overhead in a westerly direction. The next day, November 23, the newspaper published a letter from a San Rafael, California, man, William Jordon, who claimed that in late August, while hunting in the Tamalpais mountain range, he had come upon a machine shop in a secluded area. The mechanics were working on an airship and said it would soon be completed. The hunter was sworn to secrecy. Jordon may be the first person to claim an encounter with the aeronauts. He certainly would not be the last.

As the *Call* was reporting these developments, the rival *Chronicle* was headlining the claims of local attorney George D. Collins, who stated that he represented the airship inventor, a wealthy man who had come to California from Maine several years earlier. Collins was quoted as saying (though he would soon deny it) that he had seen the machine, a 150-foot metal contraption with "two canvas wings 18 feet wide and a rudder shaped like a bird's tail." Built in Oroville 60 miles away, it had flown over Sacramento and was now hidden in the San Francisco area while the inventor dealt with some technical problems. But soon he would fly the airship over the city "a dozen times," and everyone would get a good look at it. In response another San Francisco paper, the *Examiner*, sent a reporter to Oroville. He learned that the people of that city scoffed at Collins' story. "There is no wealthy man living here [Oroville] who came from Maine, or any other state, in the past seven years," the *Examiner* sneered (November 23), "and there is no one here that a diligent search can uncover who knows anything at all about a flying ship having been invented here or having left here for Sacramento."

Yet even as the ship supposedly was being repaired, reports of its passage were coming in from Sacramento and San Francisco. The object was usually seen as an "immense arc light"; dimly visible above it was a larger, dark balloon- or cigar-shaped body. At Oakland witnesses thought it was "birdlike" in appearance.

On the 24th Collins approached the *Call* to complain that the *Examiner*, which was largely skeptical of airship stories, had printed falsehoods about him and recklessly misquoted him. That day the *Examiner* had published an interview with attorney Frederick Bradley, a friend of Collins. Bradley said Collins had told him about seeing the airship housed in a barn; then its inventor boarded it and shot up into the air, as two side flaps waved like bird's wings and propelled the craft upward for 200 feet. Soon afterwards it landed easily a few feet from Collins. Collins swore this story was a lie ("Bradley must have been drinking to have imagined I told him all such rubbish," he said), that in fact he had never seen the ship but only heard about it from the inventor. The *Chronicle* (November 24) ridiculed the attorney's sudden backtracking and cited an earlier statement in which, after being asked on his "word of honor" if he had seen the airship, he had sworn he had. "Mr. Collins was evidently in a

trance at the time," the paper observed wryly.

Suspicion soon fell on itinerant dentist E. H. Benjamin, identified as a Carmel, Maine, native who spent most of his time traveling, selling pianos, and tinkering with would-be inventions. Benjamin first proved elusive, but when reporters finally caught up with him, he admitted that Collins was his attorney but that his "inventions have to do with dentistry" (*Call*, November 24). Nonetheless every time Benjamin went out in public, he was badgered with questions about the airship. Finally, sick of it all, he went into hiding, leaving behind most of his possessions. Reporters and laborers who sorted through them found nothing more exciting than copper dental fittings.

On the 24th the *Oakland Tribune* announced that a prominent citizen, George Carleton, knew the name of the inventor. He had it from a fellow Mason, "who talked with the man who saw the machine" as it was tested in the Oroville area. Carleton averred he would saw his leg off before he would break his pledge not to divulge the secret of the inventor's identity.

The following day the *Call* weighed in with even more sensational claims. W.H.H. Hart, the flamboyant former attorney general of California (he served one term), was declaring he now represented the inventor, who had fired Collins for talking too much. Yet Collins was the soul of discretion next to Hart, who seemed determined to tell all he knew (or said he knew) short of the name of the inventor, rumored now to be a Dr. Catlin, an alleged associate of Dr. Benjamin. Hart said two airships existed and his role was to "consolidate both interests." One was built in an Eastern state, and he was intimately familiar with this one, which he had seen with his own eyes. As for the California airship, he said, "I don't see any reason why [it] . . . cannot be worked. The whole trouble in the problem of aerial navigation has been a question of motive power. In this they have the right motive power . . . and that is by electrical storage batteries. . . . I propose to use [the California airship] wholly for war purposes, and within the next five or six months it will be put to the test. From what I have seen of it I have not the least doubt but [sic] that it will carry four men and 1000 pounds of dynamite." The dynamite would be dropped on the city of Havana. (In 1898 the United States and Spain would go to war, and the latter country would be forced to relinquish its Cuban colony.)

The same article quotes a secret informant's account of how recently the inventor had spent the late hours sailing from the Oroville area to Sacramento, where observers on the ground mistook engine noises for voices and music. The informant said that "about 3 o'clock in the morning [the inventor] landed in the barnyard of a farm situated in one of the bay counties. He put his airship into the barn and locked the door, for he had previously made arrangements to that end. . . . This was the very first trip of the new airship. Since then he has been out nearly every night."

In due course Hart, like Collins, moderated his claims, insisting that he had not seen the airship, only met the man "who claims to be the inventor" and seen drawings and diagrams of the craft. The alleged inventor, Hart said, "was a cousin of Mr. Linn, who was [Cuban revolutionary] Antonio Maceo's electrician." Nothing came of any of this, and soon Hart vanished from press accounts.

Nearly a century later it is impossible to judge what, if any, truth lay behind the claims he and Collins made. Conceivably they were truthfully passing on what they had been told by clients who for their part were less than honest. (Collins' and Hart's reported firsthand observations of the airships, if they are not outright lies, suggest they were the victims of an extraordinarily sophisticated hoax.) Perhaps the clients were trying to develop an airship and took advantage of publicity about unidentified airships (and of the credulity of their lawyers) to claim them as their own; if ever they existed, their own never flew. All that is clear—and all that matters for our purposes here—is that *someone* was lying.

Meanwhile reports of sightings continued up and down the state of California. Most were of nocturnal lights, and at least some of these were planets (most prominently Venus) and stars. Others were lighted kites sent aloft by pranksters. But the remainder seemed to have no apparent explanation, if one is to credit press and witness testimony. For example, on the evening of November 25, a mysterious light circled Sacramento at a rapid rate of speed. Observers included such officials as Deputy Secretary of State George A. McCalvy, District Attorney Frank D. Ryan and E. D. McCabe, the governor's personal secretary. The light shared the sky with Venus but was, according to the *Call* (November 26), "fully three times as large." Its behavior was certainly not that of an astronomical body: "When [it] first appeared it was seen moving rapidly from the northeast and heading in a southwesterly direction. As it neared the southern boundary of the city it turned directly toward the west and after passing the city went south, being distinctly visible for upwards of 20 minutes. It moved with far more rapidity than it had been seen to do in its two former visits" even though there was not a "breath of wind moving at the time." It made a second appearance later in the evening, approaching from the west and disappearing in the northeast. One witness, a Prof. Dodge, said he had seen the "outlines of a dark body" just above the light. Lt. Fred Martin of the Signal Corps stated that at four o'clock that afternoon two men told him they had just seen a rapidly moving "dark, misty object, traveling at an enormous height" in a cloudless northeastern sky.

On November 26, between 8 and 8:30 p.m., electrician Case Gilson and three other men allegedly saw an unlighted airship in the clear sky 1000 feet over Oakland. It was coming from the southeast and flying northward against the wind. Gilson told the *Oakland Tribune* (December 1) that it "looked like a great black cigar with

a fishlike tail. . . . The body was at least 100 feet long and attached to it was a triangular tail, one apex being attached to the main body. The surface of the airship looked as if it were made of aluminum, which exposure to wind and weather had turned dark. . . . The airship went at a tremendous speed. As it neared Lorin it turned quickly and disappeared in the direction of San Francisco. At half past 8 we saw it again, when it took about the same direction and disappeared." An identical object was reported over Oakland two nights later, though this time the witness, Percy Drew, said it carried a red light. About an hour earlier, in East San Jose, John Bawl and his family saw, in Bawl's words, "some bright object in the sky some 150 yards distant." As it approached the witnesses, moving in a southwesterly direction, "it was lunging from side to side, sometimes swerving sharply to one side. . . . It had a pair of wings which were constantly flapping not from side to side like a bird's, but with more of a forward and downward motion. Beneath it several feet hung a ball of red light which lit up the bottom of the ship and sent its rays far down below it. At the front was a cone-shaped projection which I surmised was a windbreak. . . . It varied in height considerably during the time I watched it. Its speed I judged to be about that of an electric car doing its best."

Just after 6:30 on the evening of December 4, travelers on a freight train between Dixon and Elmira saw two large, bright lights moving parallel to them at about 1000 feet altitude. The lights quickly outdistanced the train and disappeared in the southwestern sky.

Less credible—but characteristic of some of what was to come in the months ahead—were tales of meetings with airship inventors and crews. Among these was the yarn told by electrician John A. Horen, who informed the *Examiner* that on November 27 he met a stranger who took him to an airship hidden in a remote location some 50 miles from San Francisco. The two boarded an airship and sailed over Honolulu. When informed of her husband's story, his wife laughed, described him as a habitual practical joker, and said he had been sound asleep in his own bed during the evening in question. During the early morning hours of December 2 two fishermen near Pacific Grove supposedly saw an airship land on water and float to a beach. It turned out to have three occupants, including one addressed by the others as "captain," who explained that the ship was undergoing repairs and that, as he put it, "I am not yet ready to make my discovery known to the public, but hope to be able to do so as soon as some slight changes are made in its construction." As in other aeronaut-encounter stories which would be reported in the next months, the aeronaut's words are "quoted" extensively, as if the witnesses (in this case two Italian fishermen) were taking careful notes. The *Call* (December 5) reported the testimony of William Gordon, who said on the evening of the third he was invited aboard an airship parked a mile from Indio, then taken on a flight through southern California. The pilot "was of swarthy appearance and spoke Spanish to the only companion he had, a woman." George Jennings, proprietor of the bar at the Grand Central Hotel in Fresno, had another kind of story to tell. Just before noon on the third, Jennings told a *Call* correspondent, a dusty traveler entered the establishment, and Jennings immediately recognized him as an "old friend whose name I cannot possibly give at present." The man, of course, was one of the airship inventors. Mechanical problems and a strong air current had brought their ship involuntarily to the area, and the man was about to embark for San Francisco for parts and assistance. "I know the man well," Jennings is quoted as saying. "He had no reason to tell me such a story if it was not true."

The reason one Col. H. G. Shaw told his story about meeting Martians is lost to history, though the account in the *Stockton Evening Mail* of November 27 mentioned that Shaw ("formerly of the *Mail* editorial staff") "is at present engaged in collecting an exhibit for the Stockton Commercial Association to be displayed at the Citrus Fair which will be held in Fresno during the coming month." Perhaps it was publicity he was seeking, or maybe he just liked a good joke. Whatever the explanation, his story is interesting because it reveals that for all the talk about American and Cuban inventors, there was an undercurrent of speculation about extraterrestrial visitors. Such notions would attain more prominence as the airship saga moved eastward, but Shaw's tale is the first explicitly to link alien beings with unidentified airships.

Shaw said he and a companion, Camille Spooner (whom the *Mail*, possibly because it was in on the joke, never sought out for confirmation), had left Lodi around six o'clock on the 25th and "were jogging along quietly when the horse stopped suddenly and gave a snort of terror. Looking up we beheld three strange beings . . . nearly or quite seven feet high and very slender." The horse was paralyzed with terror, so the two men were unable to flee the scene. In any case, the beings, who looked more or less human, gave no indication of hostile intent. Shaw walked up to them and asked where they were from. "They seemed not to understand me," he reported, "but began—well, 'warbling' expresses it better than talking. Their remarks . . . were addressed to each other, and sounded like a monotonous chant." As the beings stared at the travelers, their carriage, and the horse, Shaw observed them closely, noting small, delicate, nailless hands and long, narrow feet. When he touched one under the elbow, he found the being weighed less than an ounce.

"They were without any sort of clothing," Shaw went on, "but were covered with a natural growth . . . as soft as silk to the touch, and their skin was like velvet. Their faces and heads were without hair, the ears were very small, and the nose had the appearance of polished ivory, while the eyes were large and lustrous. The mouth, however, was small, and it seemed to me that they were without teeth. That and other things led me to believe that

they neither ate nor drank, and that life was sustained by some sort of gas. Each of them had swung under the left arm a bag to which was attached a nozzle, and every little while one or the other would place the nozzle in his mouth, at which time I heard a sound as of escaping gas." The beings, "possessed of a strange beauty," each carried an egg-sized light which, when opened, revealed an "intense but not unpleasant light."

The beings then attempted what may be the first would-be UFO abduction in history. They tried, according to Shaw, "to lift me, probably with the intention of carrying me away," but they lacked the strength to budge him or his companion. Abandoning this effort, they turned and flashed their lights toward a nearby bridge. Shaw and Spooner saw a 150-foot airship hovering 20 feet above the water. "The three walked rapidly toward the ship, but not as you or I walk," Shaw related, "but with a swaying motion, their feet only touching the ground at intervals of about 15 feet. . . . With a little spring they rose to the machine, opened a door in the side, and disappeared within." The ship then flew quickly out of sight.

Shaw concluded his account with a theory that "those we beheld were inhabitants of Mars, who have been sent to earth for the purpose of securing one of its inhabitants." With tongue presumably planted even deeper in cheek, he inveighed against "the stories being told by certain San Francisco attorneys." These are "clumsy fakes" which "should not be given credence by anyone."

San Francisco attorney Hart makes his final appearance in the January 16, 1897, issue of the *Call*, with the news that some weeks ago his client, the airship inventor, took the craft apart and shipped it, via New Orleans and Key West, to Cuba.

By the second week of December, California had begun to recover from airship fever, though sporadic sightings continued into January. On the 22nd the *Stockton Evening Mail* took note of a recent daylight sighting in Acampo, just north of Lodi. Witnesses said it "seemed as big as a small house, and looked as if it were built of canvas." Another Acampo report of the same day was of something "like a cigar box with a spark of fire in it and afterwards [it] seemed as if it was burning." Yet another sighting a few days later was reminiscent of 1880 reports of flying men. Five Acampo residents allegedly sighted an "aerial navigator [which] appeared to be a man with wings, having a fiery glow presumably from the direction of some light carried with him" (*Mail*, January 26).

The 1897 story begins

On February 2, 1897, a dispatch from Hastings, Nebraska, published in the *Omaha Daily Bee* remarked on airship sightings in the south-central part of the state. The first sighting had occurred, it said, the previous fall, when an airship "was seen floating in the air about 500 feet above the ground, and after standing nearly still for about 30 minutes it began to circle about and then took a northerly direction for about two miles, after which it returned to its starting place and sunk [sic] into oblivion." On February 1 the craft returned, appearing as a "large, glaring light" hovering, ascending, descending, and moving at a "most remarkable speed." On February 4 a group of 10 or 12 worshippers returning from a prayer meeting at Inavale, 40 miles south of Hastings, saw a bright light pass far overhead. Ten minutes later it was back, only this time it was much closer to the ground and the witnesses could see a cone-shaped construction 30 to 40 feet long, "with a bright headlight and six smaller lights, three on a side, and . . . two sets of wings on a side, with a large fan-shaped rudder" (*Bee*, February 6). Voices and laughter could be heard.

All that month airship stories would circulate through the state, setting the stage for the nationwide flap that would erupt in late March. Near Big Springs, in western Nebraska, on February 17, three men reported seeing a barrel-sized light abruptly rising up 300 feet and then descending rapidly and shooting out sparks. It moved across a clear sky in this fashion until it was lost to view. The *Kearney Hub* (February 18) suggested that the "now famous California airship inventor is in our vicinity," but the incident sounds more like a modern UFO report than a typical airship sighting. (The same phenomenon was reported over North Loup on March [*Nebraska State Journal*, March 16].) If we can judge from newspaper accounts, many, perhaps most, sightings were of Venus, meteors, and kites; evidently the publicity was inflaming the imaginations of the suggestible and proving irresistible to pranksters. Mostly the "airship" was observed as a large light, but viewers were more than willing to fill in the missing details. As Lincoln's *Nebraska State Journal* (February 26) remarked of witnesses who saw a southbound light, "They were unable to tell anything about the shape of the ship back of it, but all seemed to be of the opinion that it must be the cigar-shaped vessel which was discovered at Inavale a few weeks ago." On the 26th, at 10:15 p.m., a group of persons at a railroad depot in Falls City, in the extreme southeastern part of the state, saw in the northern sky, according to dispatcher Ike Chidsey, "what appeared to be a big searchlight, moving in a westerly direction, apparently at a speed of about 60 miles an hour, and in the same portion of the sky a red light, much like a switch lamp, was plainly seen" (*Atchison* [Kansas] *Daily Globe*, February 27). Because it was moving in the direction of Stella, Nebraska, Chidsey wired the agent there, and he in turn reported seeing it a few minutes later. Other reports came in over the next 4 1/2 hours from Beatrice, Wymore, Hastings, Kenesaw, and Hartwell. Some of the station operators said the object had been appearing for the past several nights, but they had been reluctant to say anything about it for fear of ridicule. At 9:30 p.m. on March 14 something looking like a "big engine headlight" sailed over South Omaha

and was visible for between 30 and 40 minutes. This was its second appearance; the other had been a couple of weeks earlier. In both cases, according to the *Omaha Daily Bee* (March 16), "Nothing definite could be distinguished regarding any other part of it."

By the latter part of February strange lights were appearing in the skies of northern Kansas. At Valley Falls people thought they saw the outlines of an airship behind some moving lights. By March 28 the *Kansas City Star* was complaining about "credulous correspondents in various parts of Kansas" who were mistaking Venus, then in the northwestern sky, for an airship. No doubt some were, but Venus could not have been responsible for the object that appeared over Belleville late at night on at least two occasions late in March, moving at 75 mph and "lighting up the houses and city like an immense meteor and seem[ing] to stop a light northeast of the city, remaining almost stationary for 20 or 30 minutes, then sail[ing] rapidly up and down going northwest, then south passing below then above some scattering clouds and moving in a playful manner, finally disappearing in the distance; appearing again at 2 o'clock going south and return[ing] north about 5 o'clock in the morning" (*Topeka Daily Capital*, March 28). After a "blood-red light" appeared in the western sky over Topeka on the 27th, numerous residents looked for it to show up again the next evening but were disappointed. The *Kansas City Times* (March 29) remarked, "The only star [sic] near where the light of last night was seen was Venus, and some people who were not out last night made the assertion that the people had been fooled by that planet, that she was the only airship in sight. But there can be no truth in this assertion. The light seen last night probably may not have been an airship, but it was certainly neither a star nor a planet. The light moved parallel with the horizon and with great rapidity. Stars do not perform these feats. Neither do planets. And then when the strange light was reddest there was Venus, a short distance to the right, shining forth in all her effulgent glory. Again, when the midnight watchers caught another glimpse of the light, Venus had long before sunk to rest."

With the onset of April, airship sightings spread throughout a variety of Midwestern, Southern, and Eastern states. They were mostly over by the end of May, though reports of unidentified "balloons" continued in Canada, especially in Manitoba and British Columbia, through the summer (Bullard, 1982; Pethick, 1980). A full account would occupy a thick book. A sense of what the 1897 airship scare involved can be gained, however, from an examination of its constituent features, at least as they were reported in period newspapers (the quality of whose reporting, as we shall see, left much to be desired).

Representative airship reports

To many observers the airship was a brilliant nocturnal light, often compared to an arc light, which moved through the heavens at a noteworthy speed. A number of these reports are apparently of Venus or a kite. Others seem not to be. Frequently the object would appear first as a light, then at some point as a structured craft. For example, at Quincy, Illinois, late on the evening of April 10, hundreds of onlookers saw a "bright white light," with red and green lights on either side of it, flying low over the Mississippi River on the city's west side. As they watched, it rose in the air, headed east over Quincy, then south, then west. It hovered over a park for a few minutes before moving north and stopping half a mile later to hover again. It reversed direction and left in a southerly direction at "tremendous speed." The *Quincy Morning Whig* (April 11) reported, "At times it did not appear to be more than 400 or 500 feet above the ground, and in the bright moonlight was plainly silhouetted against the clear sky. Men who saw the thing describe it as a long, slender body shaped like a cigar, and made of some bright metal, perhaps aluminum, on which the moonlight glistened. On either side of the hull extending outwards and upwards were what appeared to be wings, and above the hull could be seen the misty outlines of some sort of superstructure, a clear view of which, however, was intercepted by the wings. At the front end of the thing was a headlight, and from the brightness and intensity of the stream of light thrown out it was apparently similar to the searchlights used on steamboats. About midway of the hull were small lights, a green light on the starboard or right hand side, and a red light on the port or left hand side." Estimates of its length varied from 50 feet to twice that.

Emerson, South Dakota, April 15: As it passed over town over a 15-minute period between 9 and 10 p.m., the airship appeared "cigar-shaped" with a "row of red lights along the sides" (*Sioux City* [Iowa] *Journal*, April 17). Cochransville, Ohio, April 19: "It was cone shaped, 180 feet long and flashed red, white and green lights from the bow" (*Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, April 20). Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 11: After observing an airship through glasses, R. G. Adams described it as "18 or 20 feet long. It was shaped like a cigar and in the middle and on top of it was a square light. This light was alternately red, green and red" (*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 12). Marshfield, Wisconsin, April 10: "It seemed to assume different colors, and moved at good speed. With a glass it showed up cone shape[d] with a bright headlight" (*Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 11). Decatur, Illinois, April 11: A witness said the airship "looks like two monster cigars with three bright headlights" (*Decatur Evening Republican*, April 12). Boynton, Illinois, April 16: While taking an evening stroll around 9:30, the village blacksmith saw a cigar-shaped vessel, "about 150 feet long by 50 feet wide . . . with two large wings . . . lit up very brilliantly with different colored lights . . . a very beautiful sight" (*Delevan* [Illinois] *Times*, April 22). Benton Harbor, Michigan, April 11: "[I]t had the appearance of a huge ball of fire but with opera glasses leveled up on it . . . its aspect greatly changed. It threw off a variety of colored

lights of soft yellow lustre. The outline of the ship could not be seen" as it "traveled rapidly north-northwest" (*Benton Harbor Evening News*, April 12). Bay City, Michigan, April 16: As it passed 50 feet over observers, the airship was seen to be "from 50 to 75 feet long, perhaps one-third as wide. It shone with a dull red glow, as if there were lights on the upper side. In shape it was conical and no mode of propulsion was visible" (*Saginaw Courier-Herald*, April 16). Eastern Iowa, April 8: "[H]undreds of people . . . all describe it about the same way. A bright glaring headlight, revealing a glistening steel hull, dull winglike projections on either side and a hissing sound as it glides through the air" (*Chicago Record*, April 9). Grinnell, Iowa, mid-April: J. W. Lansing said, "It was early in the evening, and the ship could be seen distinctly. It was shaped like a cigar, and it moved in various directions, some of the time against a strong wind" (*Springfield* [Illinois] *News*, April 26). Kokomo, Indiana, April 22: "The ship soared almost directly over the town from southwest to northeast. It came in the form of a ball of light. . . . Some could distinguish the faint outline of a long cigar shaped object and something that looked like arms or wings. Others saw nothing but the light" (*Kokomo Tribune*, April 23). Toledo, Ohio, April 24: Two witnesses saw "bright lights of different colors . . . attached to a cigar shaped object" at about 500 feet altitude. "Both gentlemen agree as to the size and general shape of the airship, and say that there was nothing to indicate the use of wings or propellers" (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 28). Erie, Pennsylvania, April 21: J. S. Scheer "describes the monstrous ship as being quite long and shaped like a cigar. It had two wing-like fans on each side and a huge propeller on the stern. It also carried bright lights in the bow" (*Erie Daily Times*, April 22). Dunkirk, Ohio, April 15: "The affair looked as large as a wagon bed and had something like wings stretching from each side and a propeller at each end. On the front was a red light while on the rear was a greenish-yellow lamp" (*Kenton* [Ohio] *News-Republican*, April 16). Trenton, Tennessee, April 17: A "large conical mass, shaped like a cigar, was seen behind the light. Soon a red light on the right and a green light on the left became discernible" (*Memphis Commercial-Appeal*, April 18). Denton, Texas, circa April 14: An airship passed over the face of the moon, and a stargazer who watched it through powerful glasses reported "it floated about a half mile above the earth and seemed to be about 50 feet long, of a cigar shape with two great wings thrust out from each side; a broad tail or steering sail behind and a long beak or blade resembling a cutwater on a ship in front. At the point where the beak joined the main body a powerful search light threw its rays far into the night ahead, beside which even the luminosity of the moon paled. A row of windows along the side gave out similar lights" (*Dallas Morning News*, April 16). Hillsboro, Texas, April 16: "There was a brilliant light, as if coming from an arc light . . . and then [witness J. S. Bounds] saw it gliding over a field near by. It then turned upward and he watched it until he says it must have been 1000 feet up in the air. The light appeared to him to be the headlight of some kind of a ship. . . . [T]he light went out and small ones, such as incandescent lights, appeared all around the body of the vessel" (*Austin Daily Statesman*, April 18).

Unusual reports

Bloomington, Illinois, April 11: At 12:15 in the afternoon a resident saw, moving at a high altitude and a rapid rate of speed, a "flat-shaped" object which "looked like a big piece of yellow canvas" (*Bloomington Daily Pantagraph*, April 12). Lincoln, Illinois, April 12: At 8 p.m. more than 50 observers saw an unusual aerial vehicle pass overhead. John Fitzgerald, one of those who got a particularly good look at it, reported a large, bright headlight "in front of a V-shaped object" (*Lincoln Weekly Courier*, April 13). Mount Vernon, Illinois, April 14: "What is thought to be the mysterious airship was seen here last night by a hundred persons. Mayor [B. C.] Wells said it resembled the body of a huge man swimming through the air with an electric light on his back" (*Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, April 16). Eldridge, North Dakota, mid-April: Between 9 and 10 p.m. a local man saw a "car attached to a large kite-shaped structure above it to which were fastened large wings or planes which supported the apparatus in the air. . . . [I]t stopped and swung around. . . . At one time it was so close to him that he could hear . . . a humming which he took to be the operation of a machine. Some of the time it carried colored lights, then again it was entirely without lights" (*Jamestown* [North Dakota] *Weekly Alert*, April 22). Fort Wayne, Indiana, mid-April: A fast-moving, yellow-colored object in the western sky looked "pear-shaped with the apex downward," according to witness F. Crocker. R. T. Tretheway described it as "round with a V-shaped tail to it. The color of it seemed a bright yellow and strong rays of the same colored light were constantly being shot out from the main body" (*Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette*, April 15). Beaumont, Texas, April 17: At 1:30 a.m. a night watchman observed a "globular shaped thing a little dark with a bright light the size of a star at one end" as it passed at a high altitude from the southeast to the northwest (*Dallas Morning News*, April 18). Cincinnati, Ohio, May 4: Dr. Louis Dumhoff and other witnesses reported an object "moving in a zigzag course, first up, then down." It was "egg-shaped, red in color and appearing as though a portion of it was covered with a curtain, the rays escaping in the center and at each end" (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 5). Norwalk, Ohio, May 10: "Newspaper accounts describe the airship as cigar shaped," one witness said, "but they are way off; at least, the one I saw is not of that shape at all, but round, like a huge ball. . . . I followed it over a mile. Part of the way it led me over a field. We were so far from the street lights that it was quite dark. . .

. [I]t cast a shadow, which I saw distinctly and repeatedly" (*Cleveland Plain-Dealer*, May 11).

Landings and close encounters

Western Iowa, April 4: Around 12:15 a.m. dairy farmer Dick Butler, returning home from a business trip in Sioux City, saw a glow in the cornfield near his home. The source was, according to a newspaper report, "a dark bulk through the windows of which the light shone." It looked like a "long, narrow car, resembling a corset box in shape, but perhaps 30 or 35 feet in length and six or seven in width and height. Over this car floated a cigar-shaped bag, horizontally placed, of about the same length as the car, and eight or 10 feet thick at its greatest diameter." At that moment Butler's horses bolted, and he was tossed into the ditch. By the time he was on his feet again, the object had ascended and was flying away (*Marshalltown* [Iowa] *Evening News-Republican*, April 9). Lake Elmo, Minnesota, April 13: Two men riding to Hudson, Wisconsin, from nearby Lakeland, Minnesota, at 11 p.m. spotted a figure in a clearing. "He walked around as if he was looking for something," Frederick Chamberlain said. When Chamberlain and his companion turned off the road to investigate, they heard a crackling sound, as if twigs and brush were being crushed, followed by an irregular "rushing noise." "A second later," Chamberlain said, "and we distinguished a long, high object of a gray white color. The thing struck me as resembling most of the top of a 'prairie schooner' or immigrant wagon covered with canvas. At the same instant we saw two rows of lights—four lights in two pairs—on each pair including a red and green light. The thing rose quickly at a sharp angle, so as to just clear the tree tops. As it passed over the trees to the south we saw several more white lights. But we could make out no machinery or wings or wheels or rudders or human figures, or even the exact outline of the affair." In the mud the witnesses found "14 footprints . . . each two feet in length, six inches wide, arranged seven on each side, and in an oblong pattern." A farmer in the area independently reported seeing a dark object with green and red lights flying overhead at about the same time (*St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 15). Frankfort, Indiana, April 14: A group of workers returning home from an out-of-town job in the early morning hours heard a "swishing, roaring sound" and saw green and yellow lights in a break in the clouds. A brilliant white searchlight blinded their eyes momentarily. When the men's sight had cleared, they saw a winged, cigar-shaped object descending over nearby treetops, where it hovered briefly before rising and shooting off toward the southeast, making the same noises that had brought it to the witnesses' attention in the first place (*Indianapolis Sentinel*, April 15).

In the larger context of UFO history, reports such as these are not inherently any more incredible than modern UFO reports, which they resemble to a striking degree. What differences exist are relatively minor. In the 20th Century cigar-shaped UFOs (including ones with wings) are reported less often than discs ("flying saucers") but are nonetheless among the most commonly seen anomalous aerial phenomena. A ufologist might argue that a more significant contrast is that in our time UFOs observed nocturnally are likely to be described as luminous or glowing, whereas the 1896-97 reports have the objects carrying lights on the sides but otherwise being unilluminated; yet a close reading of 20th-Century UFO uncovers a number of little-noted sightings of silver, nonluminous objects of dirigible shape, often carrying body lights and sweeping searchlights—a subject to which we shall return presently. There are, however, other kinds of 19th-Century airship stories which figure prominently in press accounts of the period and which are difficult to square with the UFO phenomenon as it is ordinarily understood. These are reported below, in ascending order of improbability and with qualifying adverbs such as "allegedly" and "supposedly" withheld for reasons of readability. It should be stated that stories of aeronaut hearings, sightings, and meetings that are at least *obvious* jokes, satires, or hoaxes are not listed here.

Aeronauts heard

Hawarden, Iowa, April 11: As a 60-foot-long, cone-shaped airship with four wings passed overhead at low altitude, witnesses heard "the working of machinery and the sound of human voices . . . among which was mingled the laughter of women" (*Des Moines Leader*, April 13). Jacksonville, Illinois, April 10: "Many reliable persons assert that they plainly distinguished human voices" as a long, narrow, metallic craft with a searchlight flew over the town (*Quincy* [Illinois] *Morning Whig*, April 11). Casstown, Ohio, April 14: From a huge, birdlike object with wings and a rudder James McKensie heard a sound like distant music and a shout from a human voice (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 16). Dunkirk, Ohio, April 15: At 4 a.m. witnesses to a passing airship, including town marshal Willis Mahon, "could hear several men . . . talking very loud, but could not distinguish what they were saying" (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 16).

Aeronauts seen

Minnetonka, Minnesota, April 11: Late in the evening a cyclist observed a "flying machine . . . shaped like an ordinary boat," with red and green lights on each side and a powerful light in front. Inside the craft were "living persons, men, women and children. They were moving about as if very busy" (*Minneapolis Tribune*, April 13). Near Birmingham, Iowa, April 14: An airship 100 feet long and 20 feet high in the center came down in a meadow almost a mile from town between 8 and 9 p.m. As witnesses raced to the scene, the craft rose with a loud whirring sound. In the moonlight two men could be seen

inside; one "carried a lantern which he waved as the ship ascended" (*Burlington* [Iowa] *Hawk-Eye*, April 16). Danvers, Illinois, April 16: Just after midnight an "airship" and a smaller "trailer which followed it very closely" were observed by many residents. "The ships were of some bright material and the occupants were dressed in western style" (*Bloomington* [Illinois] *Pantagraph*, April 17). Near Marion, Indiana, April 14: In the afternoon a cigar-shaped object with large wings appeared six miles south of the city, coming in from the northwest and veering toward the east. "Six passengers were aboard" (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 15). Near Louisville, Kentucky, April 12: Just before daylight, farmer Augustus Rodgers encountered a brilliantly lighted, "huge, oblong shape" 400 feet above him. He called his wife, and the two of them watched the object, traveling at about 100 mph, disappear in the southeastern sky. "Before it vanished uncouth and enormous shadows flickered from all parts of the ship, and both Rodgers and his wife saw a form, like that of a man, standing in the front of the ship and directing its course" (*Louisville Evening Post*, April 13). Farmersville, Texas, April 15: "Two-thirds of the citizens of the city" watched a dim light approach from the northwest. As it got closer, it turned out to be a "ship or balloon." City Marshal Brown said he was within 200 feet of it and "could see two men in the ship and something resembling a large Newfoundland dog." Though he heard the passengers speaking, they were doing so in a language he did not understand (*Galveston Daily News*, April 18). Elysian, Minnesota, April 19: Just before 6 a.m. a farmer saw an airship descend in a wooded area. He ran toward it and was within a few feet of it when it abruptly ascended. There were three men inside the craft (*Mankato* [Minnesota] *Review*, April 20). Lyons, Nebraska, April 19: At 9:30 p.m. an airship appeared a mile above the town. It had large fans or propellers which the witnesses could hear. One observer who watched it through opera glasses saw a "large man muffled in a great coat, apparently presiding over some kind of a steering apparatus" (*Logan Valley Sun* [Lyons], April 21).

Aeronauts encountered

Near Peru, Nebraska, April 6: While looking for strayed cattle, James Southard became lost. At 2 a.m. he noticed a light on a bar in the Missouri River. It was from a landed airship, 200 feet long, whose crew were repairing the searchlight. The aeronauts answered all of Southard's questions. "The craft is loaded with several tons of dynamite and is bound for Cuba," where it would bomb Spanish troop camps and ships (*Auburn* [Nebraska] *Granger*, April 9). Near Elburn, Illinois, early April: Farmers came upon a landed airship, "made of some light substance like aluminum." Two aeronauts, who were repairing the vehicle, would not reveal much about themselves, except to say that they were crossing the country from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic and were "following the Northwestern railway" (*Rockford* [Illinois] *Daily Republic*, April 12). Near Cisco, Texas, April 15: Late in the evening, seeing a light where he knew no farmhouse stood, Patrick Byrnes investigated, spotting a 200-foot airship and startling its crew members who were repairing the searchlight. "The craft is loaded with several tons of dynamite and is bound for Cuba." The airship resumed its flight at 1 a.m. (*Fort Worth Register*, April 18). Near Springfield, Illinois, April 14: At just after 9 p.m. John Halley and Adolph Wenke saw an airship land and talked with one of its occupants, a bearded scientist who stepped outside the craft. Inside, the witnesses could see another man and a woman identified as the scientist's wife. He said little about himself but remarked that "as soon as Congress recognized Cuban belligerency his air ship would be heard from" (*Springfield News*, April 15). Lexington, Kentucky, April 17: Three men taking a mid-evening stroll heard a whirring noise just as an airship descended on a vacant lot. As they rushed to the site, they encountered a 40-year-old man carrying a bucket of water from nearby springs. Declining to answer questions, the aeronaut reentered his ship and "sailed away in the direction of Richmond" (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 19). Near Beaumont, Texas, mid-April: Hearing that an airship had landed at a farm two miles from town, Rabbi A. Levy went to check out the story. In the darkness he "could see very little except the outlines of the ship," 150 feet long with 100-foot wings. "I spoke to one of the men when he went into the farmer's house, and shook hands with him. . . . Yes, I did hear him say where it was built, but I can't remember the name of the place, or the name of the inventor. He said that they had been traveling a great deal, and were testing the machine. I was so dumbfounded that I could not frame an intelligent question to ask" (*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, April 25). Near Homan, Arkansas, mid-April: Jim Hooton, a railroad conductor on his way back to work after several hours' hunting, heard a sound "like the working of an air pump on a locomotive." When he investigated, he found an airship undergoing repairs. After a brief exchange the four- or five-man crew reentered the ship, "which gradually arose with a hissing sound. . . . In less time than it takes to tell you, the ship had gone out of sight" (*Arkansas Gazette*, April 22). Rockland, Texas, April 22: At 11 p.m., alerted by his barking dogs, John Barclay looked out his window to see an oblong-shaped, winged airship hovering above a pasture. The object circled a few times, then landed. Taking a Winchester with him, Barclay went outside and confronted an "ordinary mortal" who identified himself as "Smith" and who gave Barclay $10 with which to purchase lubricating oil, two cold chisels, and bluestone. He would not permit Barclay to approach the ship. When the witness returned with the requested materials, before departing the aeronaut would say only that he was from "anywhere," adding that "we will be in

Greece tomorrow" (*Houston Daily Post*, April 25). Near Chattanooga, Tennessee, April 24: An airship in need of repairs landed on the spur of a mountain. Several witnesses spoke with its two occupants, one of whom identified himself as Prof. Charles Davidson. Davidson said he had left Sacramento a month earlier and was touring the country (*Paducah* [Kentucky] *Daily News*, April 26). Near Hot Springs, Arkansas, May 6: During a rainstorm two law-enforcement officers saw a light in the sky come down behind a hill half a mile away. After seeing two persons carrying lights, they drew their rifles and demanded to know who was there. A man with a long beard said he, a young man, and a young woman were traveling around the country in an airship, which was clearly visible behind him, as were the two other aeronauts, and they hoped to end up in Nashville at the end of their trip. He invited the officers (as they put it in a subsequent sworn statement) to "take a ride, saying that he could take us where it was not raining. We told him we preferred to get wet." The officers, who were searching for a suspect, left. Forty minutes later, on their return to the site, the airship was gone (*Helena* [Arkansas] *Weekly World*, May 13).

The mysterious Mr. Wilson

One of the especially curious aspects of the airship affair concerns several separate reports, all but one from Texas, involving an aeronaut named Wilson. Someone who may be Wilson first appears in a letter published in the *Dallas Morning News* for April 19. The correspondent, C. G. Williams of Greenville, reported that at midnight on April 16, as he was taking a walk two miles south of town, he saw a brilliant light in front of him. The light went out, revealing an "immense cigar-shaped vessel" illuminated by the light of the moon. Three men emerged from the landed craft. Two went to work on the ship, and the third approached Williams, asking if he would mail some letters but "not disclose the names and addresses." "Having been at one time connected with a daily paper, and by mere reportorial instinct I took out my pencil and paper," Williams wrote, and recorded the conversation that followed. Saying that the airship ran by "electricity," the aeronaut claimed he had perfected his ship after many years of work "at a little town in the interior of New York state." After a few minutes the aeronauts boarded the craft and flew away, and Williams went to Greenville to send off the letters.

On May 16 the *Morning News* published another letter, this one said to have been sent to Dr. D. H. Tucker from a young friend who not long afterwards perished in Grenada, Mississippi, while trying to rescue livestock from a flood. The letter, dated April 20, was sent from Lake Charles, Louisiana. The writer claimed that the day before, around noon, "while driving across country in a leisurely trot," he observed an airship coming in his direction. Half a mile from him the airship let loose with an "unearthly whistle" which terrified his horses, causing him to be thrown from the buggy. As the horses fled, the ship landed, a rope came down, and two men rushed over to apologize and to inquire after his well-being. The young man was invited into the airship, where he was introduced to two other crew members, a Mr. Waters and a "Mexican or Spaniard, who did the cooking, I suppose." The two whom he first encountered were "Mr. Wilson, the owner, and Mr. Scott Warren, his friend." When the young man asked if the ship ran by electricity, Wilson "said this was not the case, but that it was propelled and sustained by a gas. . . . I learned that Mr. Wilson (though I doubt if that is his correct name) formerly lived in Fort Worth, but I do not remember to have ever seen him. He is apparently a young man and has the typical face of a genius or an inventor." A number of ships "had been built according to plans at different places and had been put together at Mr. Warren's place, but he did not say where that was. . . . The inventor said that as soon as he could demonstrate satisfactorily the practicability of economically and safely operating his ship she and some capitalists would construct a line of air ships to be operated between New York and San Francisco and other points. . . ."

At 11 p.m. that same day, near Beaumont, Texas, 60 miles west of Lake Charles, J. R. Ligon and his son Charley noticed lights in a neighbor's pasture and went to investigate. They found "four men moving around a large dark object" which turned out to be an airship. The aeronauts asked for water. "They came to my house, each bringing two buckets. After filling them, they started to return. I accosted one of the men and he told me his name was Wilson and that he and his companions were traveling in a flying machine. They were returning from a trip out on the Gulf and were now headed toward Iowa, where the airship was built" (*Houston Daily Post*, April 21). Ligon followed them to the ship, which proved to be an enormous craft 136 feet long and 20 feet wide. It had four large wings and was steered by propellers attached to the bow and stern. The entire apparatus was powered, Ligon was informed, by electricity. Wilson said it was one of five built in a small Iowa town.

It is tempting to link this story with the one told in New Orleans by Rabbi Levy of Beaumont (see above), despite some small discrepancies. Levy places his encounter late in the evening on a farm not far from the city limits and mentions "immense wings"—not, apparently, a single wing—on either side of the craft. His estimate of a 150-foot length is close enough to Ligon's (perhaps suspiciously precise) 136 feet, and Levy has the aeronauts entering the farmer's house to get water. Both Levy and Ligon have the aeronauts saying the ship was run by "electricity." In his April 24 interview with a *Daily Picayune* reporter, Levy states that his experience took place "about ten days ago"—in other words, five days earlier than Ligon's—but he also mentions that "the whole country around was aroused by a report that the

airship had been seen and that it had alighted on a farm near by." There is no press mention of a Beaumont-area landing on or around the 14th; the closest such report is Ligon's on the 19th.

Twenty-three hours after Ligon's encounter, at Uvalde (over 300 miles southwest of Beaumont as the airship flies), Sheriff H. W. Baylor conversed for a short time with the three-man crew of an airship which had alighted close to town. One of the aeronauts gave his name as Wilson and his hometown as Goshen, New York. He inquired about a Capt. C. C. Akers, whom he said he had known in Fort Worth and who he understood lived in the area. Told that Akers now worked as a customs officer in Eagle Pass but that he frequently visited Uvalde, Wilson asked to be remembered to him. The crew reentered the ship and flew away. County Clerk Henry J. Bowles saw the object as it passed up Getty Street north of the Baylor residence (*Houston Daily Post*, April 21). When contacted by the *Galveston Daily News* (April 28), Akers stated, "I can say that while living in Fort Worth in '76 and '77 I was well acquainted with a man by the name of Wilson from New York state and was on very friendly terms with him. He was of a mechanical turn of mind and was then working on aerial navigation and something that would astonish the world. He was a finely educated man, then about 24 years of age, and seemed to have money with which to prosecute his investigations, devoting his whole time to them. From conversations we had in Fort Worth, I think that Mr. Wilson, having succeeded in constructing a practical airship, would probably hunt me up to show me that he was not so wild in his claims as I then supposed. . . . I will say further that I have known Sheriff Baylor for many years and know that any statement he may make can be relied upon as exactly correct."

On the 22nd, at midnight, Frank Nichols, a farmer living two miles east of Josserand (approximately 75 miles northwest of Beaumont), was awakened by a "whirring noise." Looking out the window, he saw a huge, brilliantly lighted vessel in his cornfield. He got out of bed and went out for a closer look. Before he got to the airship, however, two men with buckets asked him if they could draw some water from his well. Nichols consented and in return was invited to examinethe ship. The craft had a six- or eight-man crew, and its motive power was "highly condensed electricity." One of the crew remarked that five such ships had been built in an Iowa village, from which an immense stock company was being formed. The airships would be in general use within the area (*Houston Daily Post*, April 26).

The next night, at Kountze (20 miles northwest of Beaumont), an airship came down for repairs. The first witnesses were Capt. H. A. Hooks and A. W. Hodges. The aeronauts, who introduced themselves as Wilson and Jackson, said they would have to stay over for several days for repairs. "Any one wishing to see it," the *Houston Daily Post* reported (April 25), "may do so by coming to Kountze any time before Monday night [the 26th], as it will take until then to get it in flying order." The ship was estimated to be 50 feet long and 20 feet wide.

At eight o'clock in the evening on or about April 28, according to a letter he wrote to the *Houston Daily Post* (April 30), H. C. Legrone of Deadwood, Texas (130 miles directly north of Beaumont), heard a disturbance among his horses. When he stepped outside, he saw a fast-moving, brilliant, multicolored light heading toward him from the southwest. It slowed and hovered for several minutes, then descended on a nearby field. "I, by this time, having recognized it as the airship, went directly to the place of landing, and on arrival found the ship of about the same make up as given by various correspondents. Its crew was composed of five men, three of whom entertained me, while the other two took rubber bags and went for a supply of water at my well, 100 yards off. They informed me that this was one of five ships that had been traveling the country over recently; and that this individual ship was the same one recently landed near Beaumont, in the State, after having traveled pretty well all over the Northwest. They stated that these ships were put up in an interior town in Illinois. They were rather reticent about giving out information in regards to the ship, manufacture, etc., since they had not yet secured everything by patent, but stated they would soon be secure in this, and expected to establish a factory in St. Louis at an early age and would at once enter into active competition with the railroads for passenger traffic; especially in transcontinental travel. They stated that they could shorten time from Atlantic to Pacific two to three days."

On April 26 the *San Antonio Daily Express* reported that between midnight and 1 a.m. the previous night, an airship passed over the city. The same article stated matter-of-factly, citing no source, "The inventors were Hiram Wilson, a native of New York and son of Willard H. Wilson, assistant master mechanic of the New York Central Railroad, and a young engineer, C. J. Walsh of San Francisco. The men had labored on their project for several years, and when their plans were matured they had the parts of the ship constructed to order in different sections of the country, whence they were shipped to the rendezvous at San Francisco and put together on the island. After some experimental navigation to California an attempt was apparently made to cross the continent and the ship was traced as far east as Utah, after which nothing was heard of it for months. The most plausible theory of the sudden disappearance of the ship is that some defects were developed and that a rendezvous was made in some out of the way section of the west until changes could be effected. It is believed that the present trip of the machine is for further experimental purposes."

Both the similarities and the differences in the Wilson stories will be apparent even to the casual reader. Another, perhaps less immediately obvious difficulty confronting those inclined to take these accounts literally

has to do with the physical appearance of Wilson himself. Akers has him "about 24 years of age" in 1877; yet at Lake Charles 20 years later, when this Wilson should have been well into middle age, he is described as "apparently a young man." In 1980 Daniel Cohen could find no evidence that an inventor or mechanic named Wilson, Hiram or otherwise, had ever lived in Goshen, New York (Cohen, *op. cit.*).

Aeronauts or astronauts?

Throughout the airship scare newspapers everywhere were filled with claims and speculations about the airship inventor, and numerous hoax messages, allegedly dropped by inventors from their passing ships, contributed to the excitement. It is true that all across America ambitious tinkerers were working on devices which they hoped would become functioning heavier-than-air craft. On August 11, 1896, the U.S. Patent Office gave an airship patent to C. A. Smith of San Francisco and on April 20, 1897, another to Henry Heintz of Elkton, South Dakota, but neither of these craft ever flew (Lore and Deneault, *op. cit.*).

Though press treatment of the airship mystery overwhelmingly assumed its terrestrial (and usually American) origin, there was also talk of extraterrestrial visitation. More than that, there were reports of otherworldly visitors. Some, again, were obvious jokes. Others were printed, at least ostensibly (and at times only initially), as serious stories. Some examples of these:

Near Reynolds, Michigan, April 14: At 4:30 a.m. a "flying machine" came down half a mile southwest of the town. A dozen farmers who had watched it maneuvering overhead rushed to the site. Inside the craft was a giant, manlike figure, 9 1/2 feet tall, whose "talk, while musical, is not talk at all, but seems to be repetition of bellowing." Though what looked like the pelts of polar bears were visible, the giant "seemed to have no use for them, as he was almost naked and seemed to be suffering from the heat." One brave or foolish farmer who tried to approach the being was kicked severely enough to cause a broken hip. "Great excitement prevails here, and lots of people are flocking here from Morley and Howard City to view the strange being from a distance, as no one dares to go near. He seems to be trying to talk to the people" (*Saginaw Courier-Herald*, April 17).

Near Linn Grove, Iowa, April 15: A large airship passed slowly over the town, heading north, and five men followed it four miles into the country, where it landed. But when the pursuers got within 700 yards of the vessel, it spread out four massive wings and flew away. The occupants tossed out two boulders "of unknown composition." According to witnesses, the beings had extraordinarily long beards and were "queer-looking," making "desperate efforts to conceal themselves" (*Indianapolis Journal*, April 17).

Near Springfield, Missouri, April 16: While wandering through hills east of town. W. H. Hopkins spotted a landed airship in a clearing. Next to it was the "most beautiful being I ever beheld," a nude young woman with hair falling to her waist. As she plucked flowers, she spoke, with a lovely, musical voice, in a foreign language, all the while fanning herself even though it was a cool day. In the shade cast by the ship, a naked man with shoulder-length hair and a beard as long as the woman's hair lay, also fanning himself. After some minutes Hopkins approached the woman who, when she saw him, shrieked and ran to the man's arms. Hopkins tried to tell them he meant no harm, but they did not understand his words. Eventually the two aeronauts relaxed, and communication of sorts was established. Asked where they came from, they "pointed upwards, pronouncing a word which, to my imagination, sounded like Mars." The two examined him "with the greatest curiosity. . . . They felt of my clothing, looked at my gray hair with surprise and examined my watch with the greatest wonder." Hopkins was shown the interior of the ship, which soon flew away, the two occupants "laughing and waving their hands to me, she a vision of loveliness and he of manly vigor" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 19).

Merkel, Texas, April 23: In the evening, as local people were returning from a church service, they saw a heavy anchor-shaped object being dragged by a large rope which was attached to an airship in the sky not far above them. After 10 minutes a small figure dressed in a blue sailor suit started down the rope but, when he saw that he was being observed, cut the rope below him and returned to the ship, which sailed off toward the northeast. "The anchor is now on exhibition at the blacksmith shop of Elliott and Miller, and is attracting the attention of hundreds of people" (*Houston Daily Post*, April 28).

Near Cassville, Indiana, May 3: While riding home at 1 a.m., Edwin Shaffer passed a gravel pit in which sat a cigar-shaped, 40-foot airship. It was "handsomely furnished on the inside and the aerial craft was inhabited by a crew of foreign-tongued midgets who spoke no English" (*Kokomo* [Indiana] *Daily Tribune*, May 4).

A typical expression of the extraterrestrial hypothesis, 1897 version, appeared as a letter to the editor of a Tennessee newspaper. Adam Oldham wrote:

"Scientists assert that the inhabitants of Mars have superior intelligence to our people, and must have made far greater progress in the sciences. They report that the Martians have been signalling the earth with electrical lights for more than a year. An air machine can only be driven by electricity, and such a machine after penetrating the thin atmosphere of Mars, could travel through the airless space with the speed of electricity, which is 300,000 miles a second [sic], until it reached the envelope of our heavier atmosphere. . . . The airship could easily be stored with compressed air to last the travelers for a much longer journey than from Mars to this earth. The visitors, no doubt provisioned for months, evidently fear to land among strange peoples who may be barba-

rous in their view, and therefore seem to be reconnoitering, and examining the country here and there before landing. . . . I predict that the air ship will be seen many times and in many places, before a landing is finally made. I suggest that our visitors be informed that a friendly welcome awaits them. . . . The Smithsonian Institution at Washington should take the matter in hand at once. The air ship has been seen by too many creditable witnesses living far apart for it to be pronounced a sensational hoax" (*Clarksville Daily Leaf-Chronicle*, April 17).

19th-Century airships, 20th-Century views

By the summer of 1897 the airship scare was largely forgotten, and printed references to it afterwards are surprisingly rare. The first reassessment of even part of the story appeared in 1938, in an article by Rudolph Umland in the University of Nebraska's literary magazine *Prairie Schooner*. Umland dealt extensively with Nebraska reports. Though he did not take the affair entirely seriously, his article is a full and accurate account of what it involved.

The first book to mention the airship scare of the late 19th Century was Charles Fort's *New Lands* (1923). Chapter 28 devotes 2 1/2 pages to the subject, citing several of the more dramatic reports, including an April 19 visitation at Sistersville, West Virginia, where an observer looking through glasses noted, according to the *New York Herald* of the following day, a "huge cone-shaped arrangement 180 feet long, with large fins on either side." Fort also takes note of astronomers' efforts to explain the sightings (as Venus, which did inspire many "airship" reports) and the abundant hoaxes. In common with many who later would try to make sense of the affair, Fort threw up his hands. "Against such an alliance as this, between the jokers and the astronomers," he wrote, "I see small chance for our data," adding these prophetic words: "The chance is in the future. If, in April, 1897, extra-mundane voyagers did visit this earth, likely enough they will visit again, and then the alliance against the data may be guarded against."

It would be 27 years (if one does not count the omnibus *Books of Charles Fort* [1941]) before airships would reappear between book covers. Drawing, apparently, on Fort (who goes uncredited), Donald Keyhoe, in his paperback *The Flying Saucers Are Real* (1950), summarizes the episode in three short paragraphs on page 60 but manages nonetheless both to give a misleading impression and to make at least two false statements. He refers to nonexistent sightings by astronomers who viewed airships through telescopes, and he also has witnesses reporting "short" or "stubby" wings when in fact (or, anyway, in allegation) they almost invariably characterized the wings as "large" or even "magnificent." (In his imaginative retelling of the sighting at "Sistersville" [sic], he invents stubby wings in defiance of contemporary statements to the contrary.) Keyhoe does not mention the hoaxes, the supposed landings and contacts with "ordinary mortals," and the claims about inventors—the elements that Fort acknowledged confounded any immediately obvious interpretation involving extraterrestrial visitors.

The first UFO-age writer to publish original research on turn-of-the-century reports was Harvard University astronomer Donald H. Menzel, author of the first debunking book, *Flying Saucers* (1953). Chapter 6, "The Flying-Saucer Scare of 1897," is based on news stories, most quoted verbatim, that appeared in the *Oakland Tribune* and the *New York Herald*. Menzel noted the large number of hoaxes and wild rumors but added, perhaps surprisingly, "A few of the reported incidents probably referred to true flying saucers." Menzel's treatment is marred only by his assertion that Thomas Edison's April 19 dismissal of the airship phenomenon "broke the airship bubble" and "killed the sensation." As we have seen, sightings and news reports continued for almost another month. (Among other things Edison said, "I prefer to devote my time to objects which have some commercial value. At best airships would be only toys.")

Between Menzel's book, whose perceptive coverage unfortunately was largely ignored (owing no doubt to most UFO writers' hostility to this outspoken UFO foe), and 1964, little further original research was conducted into 1896-97 newspapers; a rare exception was the reprinting, in the Spring 1957 issue of Max B. Miller's *Saucers*, of a number of accounts collected by ufologist Zan Overall from 1896 and 1897 issues of the *Los Angeles Times*. But as a rule the airship scare was mentioned only in passing in UFO books by authors who seemed to know no more than what Fort had reported, though his cautionary remarks were never quoted. One of the most important mentions of the 1897 events is in Jacques Vallee's *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* (1965). Vallee's treat is brief and unsatisfactory—he twice mentions, as "the first landing of a classical 'flying saucer,'" a Carlinville, Illinois, story which is an almost certain hoax (Neeley, n.d.)—but where 1897 reports are concerned, *Anatomy* is best remembered for introducing the UFO community to rancher Alex Hamilton's tale, originally published in a Kansas newspaper (*Yates Center Farmer's Advocate*, April 23), of the rustling of a calf by alien beings in an airship. The yarn subsequently made repeated appearances in the UFO literature over the next 12 years, and even beyond (Sachs, 1980). Eventually it was exposed as a tall tale concocted by Hamilton, the newspaper editor, and members of a local liars' club (Clark, 1977; Rickard, 1977). Several years later folklorist Thomas E. Bullard would discover that Hamilton himself had admitted, when a Missouri newspaper editor asked him about the story shortly after it was supposed to have occurred, "I lied about it" (*Atchison County Mail*, May 7; Bullard, 1982).

Ufologists' perceptions of the airship story began to change as soon as the first systematic examinations of 1896-97 newspaper accounts commenced. Initial research was conducted in 1964 by Jerome Clark, who not long afterwards reported to the UFO community that matters were more complicated than Keyhoe and subsequent writers had indicated. Among landing and occupant cases, for example, "we find a number of major differences between the older [1897] and the newer [post-World War II] stories," Clark remarked, adding that these "may prove highly significant." He noted the Springfield, Illinois, encounter claimed by AdolphWinkle and John Hulle (Wenke and Halley in other accounts; see above), who reported meeting aeronauts who identified themselves as inventors on their way to Cuba (Clark, 1965). (A later investigator, Robert G. Neeley, Jr., was unable to find any evidence that the two men, however their names were spelled, ever existed [Neeley, *op. cit.*].) In a longer follow-up article Clark suggested that UFOs are a phenomenon whose true nature is unknowable but which is experienced as something that conforms to witnesses' cultural expectations; in other words, before the 19th Century people observed "gods and wizards. . . . Today, in the 'Space Age,' we are led to believe that 'flying saucers' are spacecraft. In April 1897, then—six and a half years before Kitty Hawk—what more logical than a terrestrial aircraft?" (Clark, 1966).

These arguments were considerably expanded in Vallee's *Passport to Magonia* (1969), the first major book, other than those by debunkers such as Menzel and Lawrence J. Tacker (author of the forgotten *Flying Saucers and the U.S. Air Force* [1960]), to reject the extraterrestrial hypothesis then dominant in world ufology. Vallee argued that "flying saucers" are but an ancient paranormal intelligence in disguise; previous disguises included fairy and demonic manifestations as well as 19th-Century aeronauts. Particularly revealing in this connection, he suggested, were parallels between the Merkel, Texas, story (see above) and the following story, recorded by Gervase of Tilbury (A.D. 1150-1235) in part three of his *Otia Imperialia* (1211):

"There happened in the borough of Cloera, one Sunday, while the people were at Mass, a marvel. In this town is a church dedicated to St. Kinarus. It befell that an anchor was dropped from the sky, with a rope attached to it, and one of the flukes caught in the arch above the church door. The people rushed out of the church and saw in the sky a ship with men on board, floating before the anchor cable, and they saw a man leap overboard and jump down to the anchor, as if to release it. He looked as if he were swimming in water. The folk rushed up and tried to seize him; but the Bishop forbade the people to hold the man, for it might kill him, he said. The man was freed, and hurried up to the ship, where the crew cut the rope and the ship sailed out of sight. But the anchor is in the church, and has been there ever since, as a testimony."

This oddly compelling tale led even so cautious a scholar as the prominent British folklorist Katharine Briggs to remark, "This strange early space-men story . . . shows some glimmering of scientific knowledge about the relative density of the air near the earth. It is one of those strange, unmotivated and therefore rather convincing tales that are scattered through the early chronicles" (Briggs, 1977). Nonetheless there is nothing eerie or significant about the apparent repetition in small-town Texas centuries later. It is now known that Gervase's account was reprinted in American newspapers in the spring of 1897 (see, for example, the *Taylorville* [Illinois] *Daily Breeze*, April 17), providing the hoaxer (probably the author of the *Houston Daily Post* story) with a model from which he or she deviated only slightly (even identifying the witnesses as worshippers leaving a church) in producing an 1897 version.

(On the other hand, Hopkins' tale of an encounter with a Martian Adam and Eve is conceivably not a hoax but a hallucinatory or visionary experience. Though it was not rediscovered until the 1970s, it corresponds strikingly to an obscure 1950 contact story told by an uneducated Centralia, Washington, man who claimed—those who interviewed him thought sincerely—to have met unclad space people from an Edenic Venus [Clark, 1981].)

In *UFOs: Operation Trojan Horse* (1970) John A. Keel wrote that the events of 1896 and 1897 were part of a "grand deception" carried out by sinister beings he calls "ultraterrestrials"—entities from another order of reality—who, not wanting us "even to know that they existed," elected to "construct a few craft that at least resembled dirigibles and make sure that they were seen in several places by many people, such as Chicago." They also staged landings "in relatively remote places and [contacted] a few random individuals, telling them the 'secret invention' story" so that they could "spread the word. . . . To lend further confusion to the situation, some of the contactees would be told ridiculous things which would discredit not only them but the whole mystery. Knowing how we think and how we search for consistencies, the ultraterrestrials were careful to sow inconsistencies in their wake." The inventor with whom George Collins and W.H.H. Hart dealt in San Francisco was actually an ultraterrestrial, according to Keel.

Not many ufologists or other probers into the airship mystery have been willing to embrace speculations as radical as these, or as far removed from anything that could be empirically validated. In fact, as research continued and more came to be known about the period, caution mounted and at times shaded into outright skepticism. UFO historian Loren E. Gross produced two conservative monographs, *The UFO Wave of 1896* (1974) and *Charles Fort, the Fortean Society and Unidentified Flying Objects* (1976), dealing in whole or in part with the period. By the mid- to late 1970s it was becoming increasingly evident that hoaxes played a far more

prominent role than anyone had imagined. Particularly telling was the revelation that the Hamilton calfnapping story was fictitious, in spite of published affidavits from prominent citizens attesting that "for truth and veracity we have never heard his word questioned." After that researchers were never able to take entirely seriously comparable endorsements appended to other, equally extraordinary airship reports. They learned, for example, that the Linn Grove, Iowa, landing never happened, according to the testimony of a man who lived there in 1897 (Lundt, 1973). The crash of an airship, with alien occupant, in Aurora, Texas, was concocted by a local correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News* (Simmons, 1985). The Merkel airship-and-anchor yarn, which had seemed as interesting and as suggestive as Hamilton's story, was declared a hoax by Neeley in the late 1970s (Neeley, *op. cit.*).

Soon it appeared that any landing-occupant case that could be investigated could also be counted on to disintegrate under scrutiny. Most airship investigators concluded that such stories were probably concocted in editorial offices or by jokesters in outlying districts. (Papers of the period published letters from outraged small-town readers who complained they were falsely identified as witnesses to airship activity. For example, J. H. Tibbles of Rochelle, Illinois, wrote the *Chicago Record* [April 10] that a report in a Chicago paper notwithstanding, no one in Rochelle had seen an airship on April 3; "I took it upon myself to hunt down the report, and for several days I have been busy doing so. . . . I have not [even] found a person who had seen another who claimed to have seen it.") Many of the stories, even those that to 20th-Century eyes look serious, may have been published with a nudge and a wink to the readers. After residents of Waterloo, Iowa, built a bogus airship on a property ordinarily used by a traveling circus, hired a practical joker from another town to pose as its pilot, "Prof. Jourgensen," and for a time fooled both tourists and area newspapers, the *Fort Dodge Messenger* praised Waterloo for pulling off the "biggest, yet best joke of all. . . . American people delight in being humbugged." To many Americans, including editors and reporters, the airship story was played or taken largely for its laugh value; the facts, or what facts there were, were a secondary priority, if even that.

By the time the first full-length book, Daniel Cohen's *The Great Airship Mystery* (1981), was published, even nonlanding reports were coming under suspicion. In common with other writers over the next decade (Arts, 1990; Bartholomew, 1990; Chariton, 1991; Miller, *op. cit.*), Cohen treated the airship scare less as a UFO wave than a peculiar moment in the history of popular culture. He linked it to Americans' fascination with aviation developments, proto-science-fiction tales of marvelous flying machines, and tension between the United States and Spain over Cuba. He concluded that airship reports could be explained as hoaxes and misidentifications, though he confessed to a "nagging feeling that *all* of these people could not have been mistaken or lying"; yet "there is not a single piece of tangible evidence to support any story."

The next year, in the introduction to his self-published compilation of hundreds of newspaper stories from the period, *The Airship File*, Thomas E. Bullard remarked on "how seldom airship reports turned up in the columns devoted to news from outlying communities. The content of this correspondence includes sicknesses, births, deaths, marriages, crop news, and mention of anything new or changing in these areas where newness or change was rare. A crime was a major event, and an airship sighting would surely rate a mention. After reading about a lot of Sunday picnics, weekend visits and fine hunting dogs, I can say with safety that those mentions are lacking." Bullard is implying that regular provincial correspondents were more likely to be trustworthy and thus less likely to tell sensationalistic airship yarns. In cases where featured dispatches were filed concerning local events (outside, in other words, the "area happenings" columns), the authors may not always have been true locals; they may have been urban newspaper staff writers who put phony datelines in front of phony stories. One possible exception to Bullard's dictum may be a cryptic sentence published in the "Holloway Items" column of a small western Minnesota newspaper, the *Appleton Press*, on June 1, 1898, fully a year after the airship hysteria had subsided (at least for a time): "Several strange objects have been observed floating through the atmosphere in this vicinity of late." The paper provided no more details, unfortunately. Could these have been belated airship sightings?

What happened?

Any effort to uncover the truth about the late-19th-Century airship scare comes up against some unhappy realities: Newspaper coverage was unreliable; no independent investigators ("airshipologists") spoke directly with alleged witnesses or attempted to verify or debunk their testimony; and, with a single unsatisfactory exception, no eyewitness was ever interviewed even in the 1950s, when some presumably were still living. The sole exception was a retired *San Francisco Chronicle* employee with whom Capt. Edward J. Ruppelt, then head of Project Blue Book, had a long phone conversation in 1952. Ruppelt, who died in 1960, wrote only, "He had been a copy boy at the time and remembered the incident, but time had canceled out the details. He did tell me that he, the editor of the paper, and the news staff had seen 'the ship,' as he referred to the UFO. His story, even though it was 56 years old, smacked of others I'd heard when he said that no one at the newspaper ever told anyone what they had seen; they didn't want people to think that they were 'crazy'" (Ruppelt, 1956).

In 1952 the Los Angeles-based Civilian Saucer

Investigation (CSI) invited UFO witnesses to report their sightings. Among the letters CSI received, it later noted, "was a good sprinkling of sightings extending through the 30s and several . . . sightings as early as 1896 [and] 1898" (Williams, 1952). Unfortunately, if those letters still exist, their whereabouts are unknown. In 1990 *Fate* published a letter from a reader who said her late mother, Hilda Stoll Wallace, had seen an airship near Beatrice, Nebraska, in 1897. She "was a child of nine at the time," Audrey M. Wagner wrote. "I have heard her tell many times of the strange air ship (cigar shaped) that she and her family witnessed as it passed slowly over their farm" (Wagner, 1990b). When asked for further details, Wagner stated she could remember only that her mother had said the object "was similar to dirigibles and was silver in color" (Wagner, 1990a).

It is safe to assume that there were no airship inventors flying over America in 1896 and 1897. It is wise to be skeptical of newspaper accounts of meetings with aeronauts, even as it is forgivable to be intrigued by the suggestion of a link between J. R. Ligon's story and Rabbi Levy's. If *this* aeronaut encounter happened, could not others have? Since that prospect opens up a bottomless pit of philosophical difficulties (forcing us, on what is at best vaguely suggestive evidence, to imagine a nearby parallel universe—with an aviation history slightly at variance with ours—confusing its affairs with our own), surely the answer to the question is no; surely there is a much less interesting (and sanity-preserving) explanation which does not require us to believe that anyone ever *really* met an 1897 aeronaut. In the one other genuinely interesting aeronaut encounter, the one at Uvalde, Texas, it is easy to speculate, if we do not allow the absence of evidence to stop us, that Capt. Akers and the "witness" Sheriff Baylor conspired to fashion a hoax or joke.

At the same time it must be said that, amid all the misperceptions, exaggerations, and fabrications, UFOs—and UFOs of a modern variety—*were* observed; once in a while they even touched briefly on the ground (as in the Lake Elmo, Minnesota, incident, a story that has at least the appearance of credibility). We have already noted reports of unambiguously post-Arnold unidentified flying objects amid the airships: V shapes, barrels, globes, eggs, pears, and fast-moving nocturnal lights. But what were the "airships"?

Airships through 1946

Airship scares did not end in 1897. Sightings continued sporadically until 1909, when waves erupted in Great Britain, the East Coast of the United States, and New Zealand, with a few sightings spilling over into neighboring Australia, and in 1912 and 1913 the wave returned to Britain. Note that these events occurred, and were recorded, in areas outside the western half of America. In other words, these press accounts were not filtered through what may be described as a tradition of American frontier humor. Though the American frontier had been pronounced closed in 1890, for those who lived west of the Missouri River it was, for everybody but recent immigrants and small children, a vivid memory, and the kind of rough folk joking that expressed itself in boasting and yarn-spinning was very much alive even in Ohio and Illinois, and it had much to do with the wild-and-woolly press treatment of airship sightings as well as other matters.

Elsewhere newspaper readers expected to be able to believe, within reason, what they read in their newspapers. That may explain why these early-20th-Century newspaper stories are more restrained and why they present a more credible picture of what "airships" may have been. There are no stories of contacts with airship occupants, human or otherwise, though there are a few reports of occupants (usually described as humanlike) glimpsed through windows of passing airships. The airships are typically said to resemble dirigibles, torpedoes, cigars, and boats. (There is also a 1909 report, from Onslow, Western Australia, of what may be a daylight disc; at least that is one way of interpreting the witness' description of the "airship": "It looked compact, like a dirigible balloon, but appeared to be squarer and more like an aeroplane. The sun shone on it, and flashes came from it, as though reflected from something revolving, or from metal work." There is no shortage, either, of modern-sounding nocturnal lights.) There are fewer reports of great wings, though the reports exist and seem believable. One consistent feature is that the airships are never described as luminous, as we have long expected UFOs observed in darkness to be; the lights airship witnesses observed were carried in the front, back, or sides of the vehicles or shone through windows. Witnesses also noted, as had their counterparts in 1896-97, bright, sometimes blinding searchlights.

We have already remarked on the absence of reports collected directly from witnesses; obviously we are not referring here to firsthand "reports" published in Western newspapers. The kinds of reports generally assumed to be rare or nonexistent are those in which the witness communicates his sighting directly and personally, in an account he has spoken or written himself. In fact, there are a number of such reports from the post-1897 airship period. They came to light years afterwards, when old people wrote CSI, Donald Keyhoe, Allen Hynek, and others about events they had experienced long ago but remembered well. It is certainly preferable, of course, to have testimony as soon after the fact as possible, but in this case we will have to take what we can get. At any rate, the descriptions are so strikingly consistent that they more convincingly argue for accurate recall than for its opposite.

In the early 1970s Milwaukee ufologist Lee Marshall interviewed P. A. McGilvra about a sighting the latter had made in the summer of 1900, only three years after

the great airship scare. At the time of the encounter McGilvra was 14 years old and on his way home, at 3 a.m., from a dance in a rural area near Reedsburg, Wisconsin. He had stopped at the top of a small hill because something seemed to be disturbing his horse. Seeking the cause, he looked around and then up where he saw, against a cloudless sky brilliant with stars, the outline of an enormous dark, dirigible-shaped vehicle. The object passed at a low altitude over some nearby poplar trees, and as it did so, the trunks of the trees bent dramatically as if in reaction to a strong wind, but no wind was blowing. When the object flew over the witness' head, he heard a loud swishing sound which reminded him of the sound of a stick passed rapidly through the air. Soon the object was out of sight, but the horse remained frightened for some time after. McGilvra told Marshall that other local people had had similar experiences around the same time. Though he did not use the word in his interview with Marshall, McGilvra saw an airship.

Around twilight on a day in 1904 two young Dixboro, Michigan, men, Wirt Covert and Arthur Eldert, were walking home from a trip to a rural grocery store when they spotted a large object moving from east to west at a low altitude. It went behind some tall pine trees, then passed on the other side of a high Methodist church steeple. Covert recalled, "I can still see the steeple outlined between us and this object" and, beyond the object, a range of hills. "Suddenly this object rose at least a 60 degree angle over the hills and disappeared. To this day it is fresh in my mind. Its shape reminded me of pictures of the Confederate gunboat Merrimac[k]. It had sort of a thick mast sticking up from the center and when it banked up so quick I'll swear this mast tipped backward at least 45 degrees and a bright orange light shone in the windows" (Covert, 1965).

In La Porte, Indiana, at 10:30 one evening in October 1909, a huge object resembling two inverted bowls, with a row of lights crossing the center, shined a blinding light on a wagon carrying persons on their way home from church. The horses reared up in terror. According to one of the witnesses, Ruth Smith, "illuminated tentacles of phosphorescent color" extended from the UFO to the ground; these light streams had the "intensity of a giant flood bulb." After a few minutes the object began moving slowly, edging in the direction of the wagon in a smooth, graceful motion. At 10:45 it disappeared suddenly (Smith, 1961).

"When I was seven years old [in 1910]," Myrtle B. Lee would recall, "my brother Jack and I were playing in the yard. We saw a bright object hovering just above the trees about 50 yards from us. It was silver colored and shaped like a zeppelin, but not quite as big. It had nothing hanging from the underside. We stood frozen to the ground, not seeing something like that before. We thought whoever was inside was watching us. There were no windows. When it took off, we saw it start up, and it completely vanished before our eyes. We called it a balloon. When I saw a real balloon, I knew what Jack and I saw wasn't a balloon" (Lee, 1968).

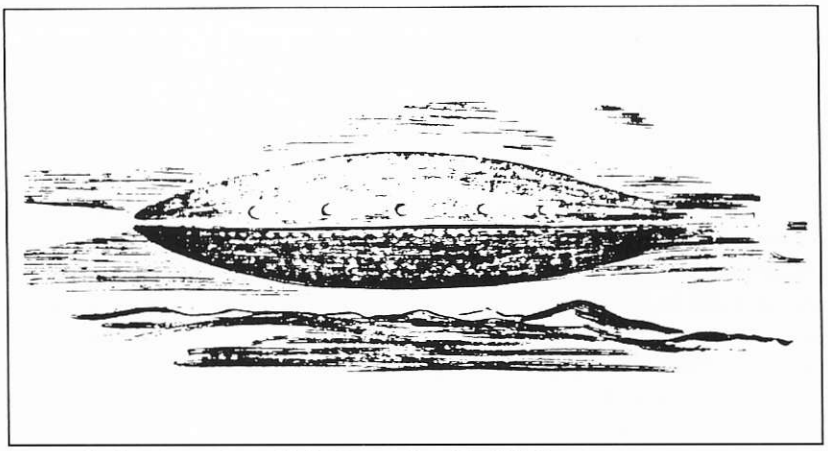
Interestingly, even newspaper accounts from these early years of the century are modest in their claims about airships and cohere closely to reports we have from other than press sources. Here are some witnesses' accounts quoted in period newspapers: "[M]y eye was at once attracted by a powerful light, which I should judge to be some 1200 feet above the earth. Outlined against the stars was a dark body . . . somewhat oblong and narrow in shape . . . about a couple of yards long . . . going at a tremendous pace" (*Peterborough* [England] *Advertiser*, March 27, 1909). A "long dark object . . . torpedo-shaped . . . very long and large" hovered for a few minutes, then "rose higher, and travelled very swiftly in a westerly direction towards the coast . . . showing . . . two very powerful searchlights at either end for a second or two" (*London Evening News*, May 15, 1909). A fast-moving object "like a boat with a flat top" and 150 feet long sailed over a farm near Greenvale, Australia, in the early morning hours (Brunt, 1975); compare this with the Michigan UFO mentioned above. Other newspaper stories mention, as had many in 1896-97, that some airships possessed great wings—a detail cited in only one of the firsthand reports available to us (see below) but that we will probably have to accept as an accurate representation of what some witnesses said they saw.

Had it been published in the local newspaper, Lloyd L. Arnold's 1913 sighting in Lansing, Michigan, would likely have been reported as an "airship" observation. At dusk, he told Gary Larreategui years later, he saw a "golden-colored oval-shaped object" at 500 feet altitude. Moving at a great speed, it was "better than 100 feet in diameter and moved without a sound. . . . [It] was well lighted by the setting sun, which would probably account for its golden hue" (Clark and Farish, 1974). Possibly the incident *was* reported in the local paper; certainly one very much like it was. Near dusk, according to the *Lansing State Journal* of June 30, 1913, an airship streaked over a Lansing racetrack as a race was in progress. "The aerial mystery carried no lights of any description and was too elongated for an ordinary balloon," the paper said.

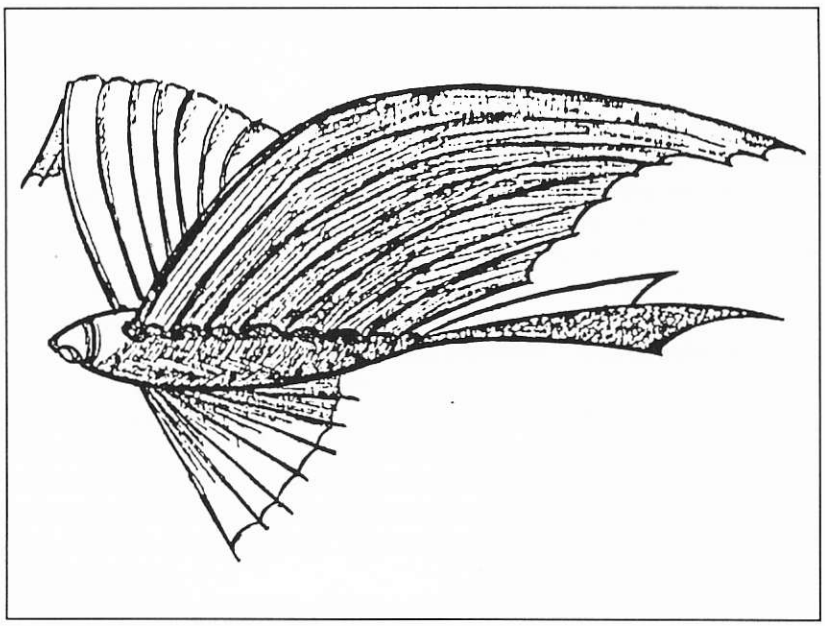
In the years that followed, sightings of airshiplike objects continued. Some examples taken from both press and personal accounts:

Manchester, England, October 14, 1914: Albert Buss observed an "absolutely black, spindle-shaped object" crossing the sun. "Its extraordinarily clear-cut outline was surrounded by a kind of halo" (Fort, 1941). Rich Field, near Waco, Texas, early 1918: Soldiers leaving the mess hall after the evening meal were startled to see a 100- to 150-foot-long cigar-shaped object coming toward them. "It came directly overhead," according to witness Edwin Bauhan, "and was no more than 500 feet high so we got an excellent view of it. It had no motors, no rigging, it was noiseless. . . . It was . . . a rose or sort of flame color.

. . . I could observe no windows. . . . We all experienced the weirdest feeling of our lives, and sat in our tent puzzling over it for some time" (Bauhan, 1953). Between Wathena, Kansas, and Rushville, Missouri, June 8, 1920: Two hundred persons, all of them rural residents, saw a large cylindrical object; they said it flew at an altitude of no more than 75 feet. When it reached Rushville, it turned sharply to the right and to the east and vanished in a cloud two miles away (*St. Joseph* [Missouri] *Gazette*, June 9). Osage hills of Oklahoma, January 1924: On a very cold night two riders saw a beam of light shining on the snow. The source was a large, cigar-shaped object "with white dots of lights on the side and a blue flame at the stern." The object "made a slight hissing noise" (Powers, 1953). North of Chicago, June 1925: At 2:30 a.m. a driver stopped his Model-T Ford to watch a 300-foot-long, cigar-shaped object fly south toward the city. "It was a lot of colors, such as blue, red, white, green; also, red sparks were flying away from its nose . . . and about 100 feet down through the center [was] all lit up with windows. As it passed in front of us a heat wave came down from it" (*San Diego Evening Tribune*, August 12, 1965). Wolfe County, Kentucky, summer 1927: Nine-year-old Reece Lacey saw a "perfectly shaped, huge fish, with big fins extended outward near the front and small, short ones near the rear" (Lacey,1958); compare this object with the ones depicted in airship sketches published in the *San Francisco Call* of November 23, 1896, and in the *Dallas Morning News* of April 16, 1897. Between Lafayette and Newton, New Jersey, circa August 1942: Three adults saw a huge cigar-shaped object hovering near them. It "had two rows of windows" which "gave off blue, green, white and red fluorescent lights. . . . We watched this object for approximately 10 minutes; then it silently and very slowly took off. From where I stood, I had the impression of hearing laughter or happy voices. My imagination? I cannot say. I know I felt this happiness very strongly. My husband and I also got in our car and drove to Ogdensburg [New Jersey] to our home. As we drove along, I again saw this large cigar-shaped object, and suddenly it took off very fast and disappeared" (Howell, 1979). Santa Barbara, California, October 1943: At 9 p.m., as she gazed out from the balcony of her home, an air spotter for the Civilian Air Command noticed a "huge dark aerial object approaching." Moving soundlessly, it barely skimmed over a nearby hill. "From the front of the object a beam of light shot down at an angle toward the earth," she said. "At intervals it swung from side to side as if scanning the hills and homes below. I sat in my balcony, too frozen with terror to move. I realized that the object was flying very low, for it filled my view and seemed just barely to miss hitting our two-story house as it passed overhead" (Finley, 1958). Queens, New York, summer 1944: "We were riding our bikes on a footpath adjacent to Grand Central Parkway . . . in a wooded section. As we started climbing a hill, we looked up and saw a cigar-shaped object broadside to us. . . . [I]t was longer and slimmer than a blimp; it was of smooth metal construction with no windows or openings in sight. It didn't have a gondola on its underside as normal dirigibles and blimps do" (Wieland, 1961). Lafayette, New York, spring 1946: Driving in an open convertible, two men noticed a gleam in the sky. It turned out to be from the sun reflecting on a



From the San Francisco Call, *November 23, 1896.*



From the Dallas Morning News, *April 16, 1897.*

metallic cigar-shaped structure with sharply pointed ends. It was perfectly smooth, with no protrusions, motionless, 300 to 400 feet long, and at 5000 to 10,000 feet in altitude. After two minutes it disappeared instantaneously (NICAP files). Ipswich, Massachusetts, July 1946: A "long silver-colored cigar (projectile shaped) appeared suddenly out of the haze which hung over the water on a hot muggy day. . . . It moved soundlessly. It was low over the water—it had no fins—nothing that I could see projecting. . . . My view was brief since it disappeared suddenly" (Allen, 1952).

Airship occupants figure in personal reports as well as press ones. Two examples of the former:

Playing in a Baltimore baseball field one day in the spring of 1910, five-year-old Lawrence Crone spotted a metallic, brown, blimplike object, over 100 feet long, hovering near a pine tree 200 feet away. Along its side was a row of variously colored rectangular windows. Only one was clear, and through that strange entities took turns looking at him, in groups of twos and threes; he thought there may have been as many as 20 of them. From what he could observe of them—only their heads and upper bodies were visible—they were conical in shape, with pointed heads; possibly the effect was caused by headgear, since the points varied in color from being to being. They were dressed in light-colored garments with a furlike texture. Each of the entities had small dots for eyes and a straight line for a (presumed) mouth but no other features. According to Crone, who related the story separately to ufologists Ted Bloecher and Thomas P. Deuley, two young men also saw the sight and were badly frightened (HUMCAT files).

A somewhat similar CE3 took place one evening in Somerville, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1938. Malcolm Perry saw what he first took to be a Navy blimp gliding quietly from east to west, but when a second glance failed to spot gondola or propellers, Perry stopped to observe more carefully. "I noticed there were what looked like square or rectangular port holes in the sides," he recalled, "and I could see the silhouette of a person looking down at me. . . . I had a terribly strong urge to wave with all my might but restrained myself." He looked up and down the street in hopes of seeing other witnesses, but he was alone. "I looked back and could see other people at other portholes apparently changing places [and] looking down. At this point it disappeared behind some low scudding clouds, and I couldn't see it anymore" (Perry, 1964).

For the benefit of readers unversed in pre-Arnold UFO reports, we must emphasize here that airship UFOs were not the *only* kinds of aerial anomalies then being observed. As in 1896-97, people were seeing varieties of objects familiar to all ufologists and voluminously documented in the literature. Our purpose here is to define the particular kind of UFO that created the airship legend.

This article concludes in the next issue of IUR. ■

EDITORIAL — *continued from page 3*

cases more frequent, and UFO waves became like that in the Hudson Valley and, now, Belgium. Waves are now more limited in space, but continue longer, several months or even years, with a low-flying, large triangular UFO the object most commonly reported.

It would surely seem that waves like these, particularly the events in Belgium and the involvement of the military, are predestined to increase serious interest in the UFO phenomenon. That was the dream. The reality is that life goes on as before.

Why that should be so is not hard to discover. Most scientists don't get involved in research these days unless there is money available for a topic. Money isn't appropriated for UFO research because budgets are tight. The Belgian sightings can be ignored because they happened in Belgium, not the United States or England. The French, as is their wont, took a bemused attitude toward the whole affair, as they have toward Belgium throughout history. Most media are interested in sensationalism, and the serious press, personified by the *New York Times*, has a hard, skeptical shell that repels any evidence for anomalies (the *Wall Street Journal* is a notable exception). In other words, society is structured so as to make the recognition of anomalies like UFO reports highly unlikely.

Are there lessons in all this? I think so, and they go like this. First, there is no perfect case (unless UFOs land on the White House lawn, an event that immediately puts CUFOS, SOBEPS, and other groups out of business). Second, this should not be viewed as somehow discouraging, because with very few exceptions, there are no "perfect cases" in any science. Recognition of a new phenomenon or theory in any discipline is a long-term affair, as was the case for the theory of continental drift in geology. Ufology is and will be no different (though I must admit my patience is being tried a wee bit). So third, we should press ahead as most of us have been doing, one small piece of the puzzle at a time.

The dream is over, and it's morning in ufology. These new sightings in Belgium and the worldwide changes in UFO waves and sightings are intriguing, if still very puzzling. They give us lots of things to think about, as we compare today's cases to those of 40 years ago. As the Rolling Stones have reminded us, you can't always get what you want, but sometimes you get what you need.
— *Mark Rodeghier*

Now available . . .

Journal of UFO Studies new series, vol. 2, 1990.
$17.00 postpaid.

UFOCAT is back!

After a 10-year hiatus, CUFOS has reactivated the UFOCAT computer database. UFOCAT was begun by David R. Saunders as part of the Condon Project at the University of Colorado in the late 1960s, then continued by Dr. Saunders and CUFOS until 1980. At that point, the file had about 106,000 entries (but not this many individual cases, as there are many duplicate entries).

UFOCAT was originally stored on mainframe computers, but advances in technology allow it to be maintained today on a personal computer. Donald A. Johnson, a former associate of Saunders, is now coordinating the UFOCAT project. Although UFOCAT lacks cases from the 1980s, it is still the largest computer database extant on UFO reports. Moreover, Dr. Johnson has already begun to add new cases to the file.

UFOCAT has fields to record information on dozens of report parameters, including date, location, weather, number of witnesses, effects on witnesses, type of UFO and its size, and UFO actions. UFOCAT, like most computer databases, does not record narrative details of a report, but instead codes the report information. Cases are classified using the Saunders system (ranging from type 0 to type 9).

As before, case listings from UFOCAT are available from CUFOS for a nominal fee. For example, the price for a state listing is $10.00 plus $2.50 for postage and handling. A listing of photographic cases, already produced, is the same price. Listings can be produced on any subset of the database that can be logically specified, such as all cases with multiple witnesses in which the UFO emitted sound that occurred in the western U.S. before 1960. When requesting a listing, please specify whether you would like it sorted by geographic location or by date.

For further information and to place orders, please contact Don Johnson at: P.O. Box 734, Marlton, NJ 08053. A portion of any fee will be donated to CUFOS, and that portion will be tax deductible.

CUFOS is planning to add as many unrecorded cases to UFOCAT as is feasible. Johnson will be contacting overseas UFO groups to ask for their assistance in this project, but we want to add unrecorded U.S. reports as well. If you are an investigator with reports in your files, we ask you to send copies to CUFOS so that the information can be added to UFOCAT. By doing so, you make your work available to researchers all over the world. As a quid pro quo, CUFOS will help defer the costs of photocopying for investigators sending case reports, and for those who send a significant number of reports, case listings can be made available at no cost. If interested, please contact Mark Rodeghier at the CUFOS office.

Johnson is also interested in having volunteers assist with the actual coding of case reports. If you have an interest in such work, please contact him directly.

UFOCAT has been used by many researchers over the years. As illustration, Rodeghier's catalog of vehicle interference reports was begun with a UFOCAT printout of such cases. As demonstrated by Fred Merritt and Saunders, it is also possible to do research directly on the database, exemplified by their study of patterns in the distribution of reports in geographic location and time.

CUFOS wishes to support UFO research as much as possible, and so we have decided to make the complete UFOCAT database available to serious researchers. Those wishing to obtain UFOCAT must, in addition to paying a fee, sign a license agreement restricting their use and forbidding them to make copies of the files. The file is currently maintained in DBASE IV·, but it can be sent in several formats, including ASCII. If interested in this unique offer, please contact Johnson directly for futher details. ■

New CUFOS board member

At the February board meeting of CUFOS, Dr. Johnson was elected as a full member of the board. Don has been active in ufology for about 20 years, and one of his first tasks was to assist David Saunders in the development of the UFOCAT database. It is only fitting, then, that Johnson's primary task for CUFOS is to maintain UFOCAT, which he reactivated last year.

Johnson has a Ph.D. in quantitative psychology and works as director of research for an organization that develops and administers personality tests. In ufology, he may be best known for his series of papers on vehicle interference reports, some of which have been published in the *Journal of UFO Studies*. In the past few years, he has been investigating abduction reports, with a focus on the personality characteristics of abductees.

We are very pleased that Johnson has agreed to serve on the CUFOS board.

CUFOS photo exhibit . . .

The CUFOS photo exhibit will be on display April 18-20 at the North Park Mall, 10950 N. May Avenue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.